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# Preliminary Evaluation of the Enterprising Communities Program

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Public release version – RDA Wheatbelt acknowledges the valuable contribution to this program by the participating communities. To protect the ideas and initiatives generated within each community, RDA Wheatbelt has removed specific information.



An Australian Government Initiative

## Executive summary

### Introduction

The Enterprising Communities (EC) program was conceived as an approach to engage and invigorate Wheatbelt communities in recognising that the responses to the challenges they faced and the future of their communities rested as much with the community as with external influences. The key elements of the program were grounded on a series of films of six communities that had successfully undertaken community enterprises in conjunction with supporting facilitated workshops.

In initiating the program Regional Development Australia Wheatbelt (RDAW) invited expressions of interest from the Wheatbelt's 42 shires and community organisations within the region. Initially 16 shires or organisations across 15 shires expressed an interest in staging a total 38 Enterprising Communities Events. At the conclusion of the project period, 22 events had been delivered across 13 shires with three shires undertaking to hold an additional six events at their own expense.

### Evaluation results

Overall 478 people participated in the 22 events held in 13 Wheatbelt shires. This represented 3.5% of the total population of the 13 shires. Of more importance was that the program was delivered in eight shires that had registered a decline in population and one shire that had no increase in population between 2011 and 2016<sup>1</sup>.

Of the 478 people that attended the events, 161 people from nine events completed pre and post event evaluations. Their responses constituted the quantitative measurement of event outcomes. These showed that level of awareness and understanding of what is community enterprise development among participants had increased from 33% pre event to 80% post event. Similarly there was a substantial increase in the number of participants who viewed the event as relevant from 62% pre event to 92% post event. Likewise more participants (75%) indicated that they had gained ideas from the events than those who anticipated that they would in the pre event evaluation (61%). Of note was that the events had increased the number of participants with confidence in the future of their communities from 70% pre event to 85% post event.

### Value of the events

In regard to the benefit of the events there was a general consensus across the various locations that the Enterprising Communities events were of benefit with 78% rating their events highly (47%) or very highly (31%) and no one rated an event as of no benefit. Correspondingly the majority (87%) of participants highly rated the presentation of the event with more (89%) indicating that they would recommend it to other people.

### Outcomes

Since the Enterprising Communities events have been delivered, a number of communities are already planning events or activities while in other community's conversations have been started.

There were three key outcomes that were expressed in the summaries of events and follow-up feedback from organisers, which were common to all shires where the events had been held. These were: a lift in enthusiasm and a flow of ideas; desire to initiate community level action and increased interaction between the different demographics that make up the communities.

Though all three outcomes are important, it could suggested that the most important is the third outcome being the increased interaction between the different demographics that make up the

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<sup>1</sup> ABS 2016. Census of Population and Housing: Time Series Profiles; LGAs Catalogue number 2003.0

communities. It is this that will result in a whole of community response and engagement to the challenges that confront the communities. The following comments of two organisers indicate that in their communities, the events have contributed to this occurring:

*“One of the most noticeable for me as the manager of XXX is seeing the traditional hierarchal group process being discarded and a ‘whole of’ collaborative process replacing this. Facilitated conversations certainly allowed a safe space for community to mend and/or build new bridges to allow collaboration.”*

*“The atmosphere at the end of the forum was very different from the start of the evening when people chose to sit in their respective groups and were unsure of the potential of the forum. By evening end we were delighted to see animated conversations, new connections forged as community members appreciated that they shared many similar ideas and had the same drive and commitment to bring about a fresher, vibrant, invigorated XXX.”*

### Immediate impacts

While in some respects it is too early to qualify broad ranging impacts, there are indications of immediate internal community impacts. This is supported by the comments contained in some of the individual event reports as well as observations of interview participants in addition to participant and organiser feedback after the events. For example, as one organiser noted:

*“The Enterprising Communities Program has allowed the XXX community the opportunity to look at what can be achieved by small rural towns, and kick started a process to nurture and bring both economic and social change to our town. Inspiration was a vital part of this process and the film viewings certainly sparked flames that were and are the catalyst to starting conversations full of passion.”*

Added to these comments were those of the other organisers during the informal follow-up process conducted by phone three to four weeks after the events who described a developing sense of empowerment that had not been present in their communities or they had noticed before the events.

In conclusion it could be said with some confidence, based on these responses and the objective evaluation that the Enterprising Communities program has delivered in terms of outputs and beneficial outcomes and there is a sound likelihood that it will also deliver positive impacts.

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## 1. Overview of the region

The Wheatbelt Region has a population of almost 74,000 and covers 154,000 square kilometres which encompasses 42 shires and approximately 200 communities within five sub regions being: Avon; Central Coast; Central East; Central Midlands and Wheatbelt South.

Between 2006 and 2016 the population of the Wheatbelt has grown by only 3% in an equal distribution pattern. For instance, eight shires experienced between 11% and 23% growth whereas eleven shires being outer regional or remote, showed a decrease of between 2% and 20%. At the same time a further four shires have registered zero population growth over the same period.

This suggests that almost a third (36%) of the shires in the region are potentially in a state of social vulnerability and face an increasing trend in the degradation of social and support networks that will undermine the psycho-social wellbeing of individuals and communities.

## 2. Introduction

A contributing factor to the decreasing population in the outer regional and remote areas could be attributed to agriculture' structural and technological changes in conjunction with less favourable climate outcomes. An increase in the farming property size along with technology advances has led to fewer farming families and lower requirement for farm employees in many of these shires. Additionally a run of poor seasons during the past two decades has led to a relatively high percentage of farming businesses either selling up or being sold up.

Ultimately these elements along with secondary aged children and increasingly their families, moving to the city for secondary education has undermined the social and support networks in the shires with and without declining populations. For example across the region there has been a 10% decrease in the number of 0-14 years population between 2006 and 2016, a 2% decrease in the 15-24 years and 18% decrease in the 35-44 years populations. At the same time the 55-64 years population increased by 22% and the over 65 population by 54%.

The skewing of the region's population towards the older end of the age spectrum may represent serious challenges for shires and communities. This could be in regard to meeting the social needs of the older demographic and ensuring the continuation of sports and community groups that underpin the social fabric of country communities and by their existence, define the sense of community.

In essence, there is an increasing need for many of the shires and communities in the region to respond to these challenges of static or declining and ageing populations from a bottom up approach. While Royalties for the Regions and other funding sources have improved the amenities and physical aesthetics of many rural and remote communities in the region, it could be said that such amenities and aesthetics do not alone make a community.

Ultimately the future of these vulnerable communities and the less vulnerable communities, rests with the community member's themselves and what they do to redevelop and or maintain their community social structures and support networks. As such, RDAW recognised that this was a key element in promoting social resilience within the region's communities and sought funding from RDAs and Lotterywest to facilitate processes through which the people of the Wheatbelt could reenergise and revitalise their communities.

The approach identified by RDAW as the most applicable was community enterprise development delivered within an Enterprising Community program framework involving a series of film presentations and or workshops. The films comprised examples of two WA and four Eastern States

country communities' development and implementation of different community enterprises that have had a positive ongoing impact for those communities.

The films were distributed to the interested shires and community organisations who were given the option through supporting funding to conduct community film nights and or facilitated workshops. The following report details the responses of community participants to aspects of the film nights and workshops covering various topics such as: knowledge about community enterprises, ideas derived from the event and the benefit and relevance of the events.

### 3. Evaluation methodology

#### 3.1 Field work evaluation

In undertaking the evaluation, RDAW's Research, Evaluation, Project Support Officer (REPSO) personally attended five events held in the four sub regions in which the program was delivered. The events attended were in:

- Wheatbelt South x 2
- Central East
- Central Midlands
- Avon

It was decided to attend these particular events as the shire of each location had shown a ten year decline, or in one case a five year decline in population. In addition as there were no events being held in the Central Coast sub region, it was decided to attend two locations in Wheatbelt South as the sub region had shown no increase in population between 2006 and 2016.

The evaluation of these events entailed a quantitative/qualitative approach. The quantitative approach took the form of a pre event and post event questionnaire. In turn the qualitative approach was structured on observations made during the events along with talking to some participants immediately after the events. In addition a further follow-up after a more extended period of time was undertaken with key stakeholders who were involved to see if ideas were being progressed.

In addition to the evaluations collected by the REPSO, an electronic copy of the pre and post evaluations were sent to the organisers of the events that the REPSO would not be attending with the a request for the evaluations to be completed as directed. Whereas some organisers complied and ensured that the evaluations were completed, a number of organisers overlooked the requirement or did not ensure that the majority of their participants responded. While this has meant that it is not possible to present results derived from every event undertaken in the region, it can be accepted that results can be regarded as representative based on the number of responses collected (149).

#### 3.2 Evaluation questionnaires

Two evaluation questionnaires were constructed with one intended for distribution and completion prior to the commencement of the event and the other for completion after the event had concluded<sup>2</sup>.

##### 3.2.1 Pre event evaluation questionnaire

The pre event evaluation sheet incorporated demographic questions in relation to gender, age, location and in what capacity the participant was attending the event in, being as an individual, representative of a community organisation or shire representative.

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<sup>2</sup> See appendices 1 for a copy of the pre-event evaluation and appendices 2 for a copy of the post-event evaluation.

The questionnaire then asked participants to respond to the four questions on a five point scale of 'not at all' through to 'definitely' with an additional option provided for an 'unsure' response. The questions were:

- Are you aware of community enterprise development?
- Do you think an event like this has relevance for your community?
- Are you confident that the event will provide ideas that will make a difference to your community?
- Are you confident about the future of your community?

Participants were also invited to add any comments if they wished.

### *3.2.3 Post event evaluation questionnaire*

The post event evaluation questionnaire consisted of seven questions of which the following four questions reflected the four questions asked in the pre evaluation sheet. These were again on a five point scale ranging from 'not at all through to 'definitely' with an option for an 'unsure' response.

- Do you know more about community enterprise development?
- Did you think this event has relevance for your community?
- Has the event given you any ideas for community enterprise development activities that could be run in your community?
- Are you more optimistic about the future of your community having attended this event?

The questionnaire also invited participants to list up to three ideas that may have been inspired by the event.

The final three questions asked participants to rate the benefit and presentation of the event and if they would recommend the event to others on a five point scale of 'not at all' through to 'very highly'.

### *3.2.4. Analyses methodology*

A univariate approach was used in conducting the analysis of participant's responses. In doing so a numerical value was attributed to responses on the five point scale ranging from 1 for 'not at all' through to 5 for 'definitely' or 'very highly'. The 'unsure' responses did not have an attributed value and were therefore omitted from any measurement of the mean but were included in the description of frequencies.

The qualitative responses in the post event sheet were analysed on a basis of common themes within a series of contextual structures that included:

- Community engagement
- Engaging the community's youth
- Town scape and enterprises
- Events/activities
- Built, managed and creative assets
- Natural assets
- General

The frequency of responses in each area were calculated as a percentage of all responses.

### *3.3 Non-field work evaluation- Community self-reporting*

In addition, all of the communities that participated in the program were required to present a report summary of the events and outcomes of their particular events. Responses of immediate outcomes from these reports were included in the evaluation of outcomes in this report. A copy of these reports are included in this report's appendices.

### 3.4 Longitudinal evaluation

The final process of this preliminary evaluation was to conduct a follow up examination of progress among the participating communities to identify immediate impacts along with the potential for longer term impacts.

## 4. Evaluation results

The description of the evaluation analyses will comprise an overall set of results drawn from an aggregation of evaluations of the various film and workshop events either attended by the RDAW REPS Officer or were provided by other communities.

### 4.1 Overall responses

#### 4.1.1 Demographics

Generally there was a relatively balanced representation between males and females at the events although in comparison to ABS data for the Wheatbelt it could be said that females were somewhat over represented and males under represented (Table 1).

Table 1

Gender-Enterprising communities events		Gender-Wheatbelt derived from ABS Census data	
Male	Female	Male	Female
42%	58%	51%	49%

Overall the average age of event participants was 47 years with the 25-34 and 65 and over age groups being representative of those age populations in the Wheatbelt (Table 2). Alternately the 35-44, 45-54 and 55-64 years age groups at the events were to a certain degree over represented when compared to the region whereas the 15-24 years population was underrepresented.

Table 2

Age-Enterprising communities events		Age-Wheatbelt derived from ABS Census data	
15-24 years	3%	15-24 years	9%
25-34 years	13%	25-34 years	10%
35-44 years	18%	35-44 years	11%
45-54 years	21%	45-54 years	14%
55-64 years	24%	55-64 years	16%
65+ years	22%	65+ years	20%

In terms of in what capacity participants were attending the events, some attended as both an individual community member and a representative of a community organisation or shire (Table 3).

Table 3

In what capacity were people attending the event	
Individual community member	64%
Community organisation representative	22%
Shire representative	12%

#### 4.1.2 Pre and post event responses: Changes in awareness, relevance, ideas and confidence

Results show a substantial shift in participant's awareness of what is community enterprise development after the event with only 33% pre event indicating an understanding compared to 80% post event (Figure 1).



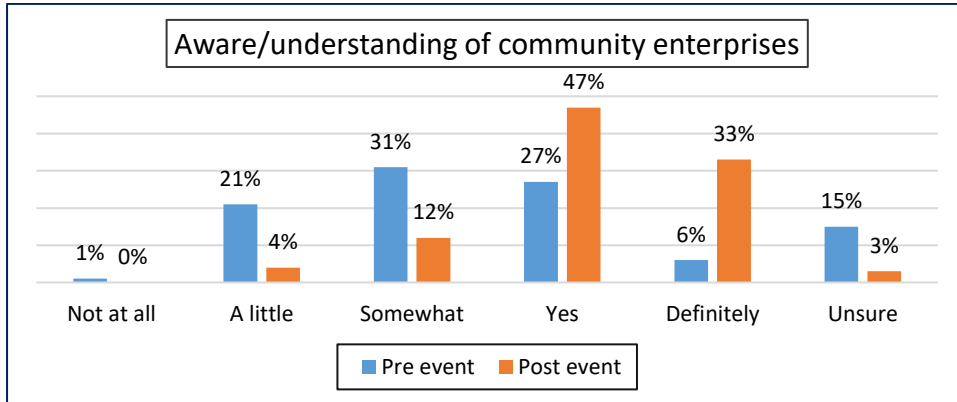


Figure 1

In regard to the relevance of the event, there was a substantial increase in the number of participants who viewed the event as relevant from 62% pre event to 92% post event (Figure 2). The other noteworthy difference was the change in the level of rating participants attributed the event's relevance post event with 51% ascribing the highest rating compared to 13% in the pre event evaluation.

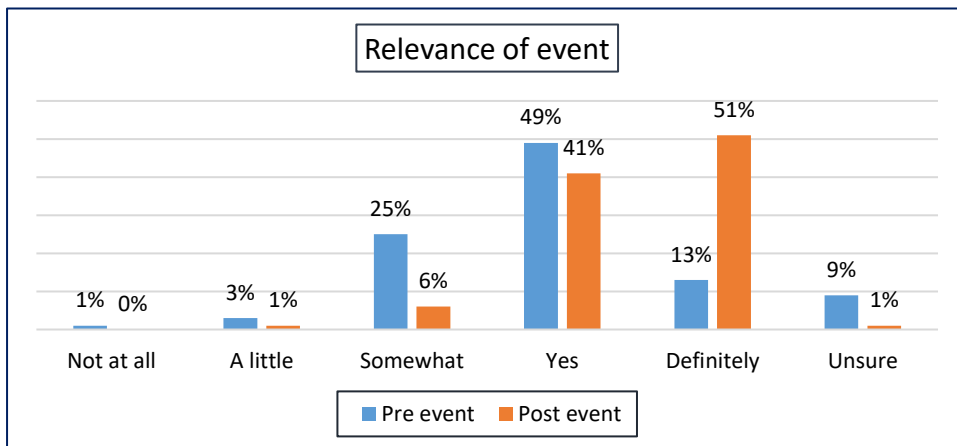


Figure 2

Similarly more participants (75%) indicated that they had gained ideas from the events than those who anticipated that they would in the pre event evaluation (61%) (Figure 3).

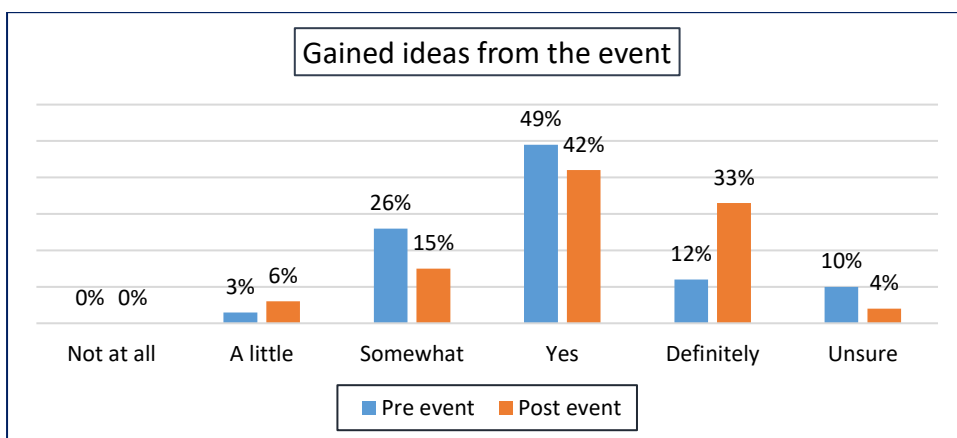


Figure 3

Of interest were the pre and post event responses to confidence in the community's future (Figure 4). While the results showed changes from pre event responses of 70% confidence to 85% post event it was the increase in the number of participants who were 'definitely' confident in future of their community compared to pre event response levels that is noteworthy.

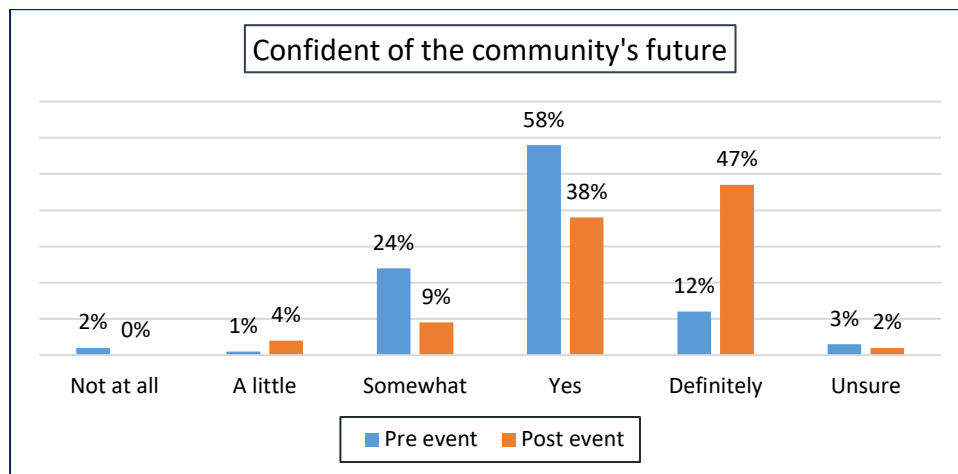


Figure 4

#### 4.1.3 Rating of event's benefit, presentation and recommendation to others

There was a general consensus across the various locations that the Enterprising Communities events were of benefit with 78% rating their events highly (47%) or very highly (31%) and no one rated an event as of no benefit (Figure 5).

Equally the majority (87%) of participants highly rated the presentation of the event with more (89%) indicating that they would recommend it to other people (Figure 5).

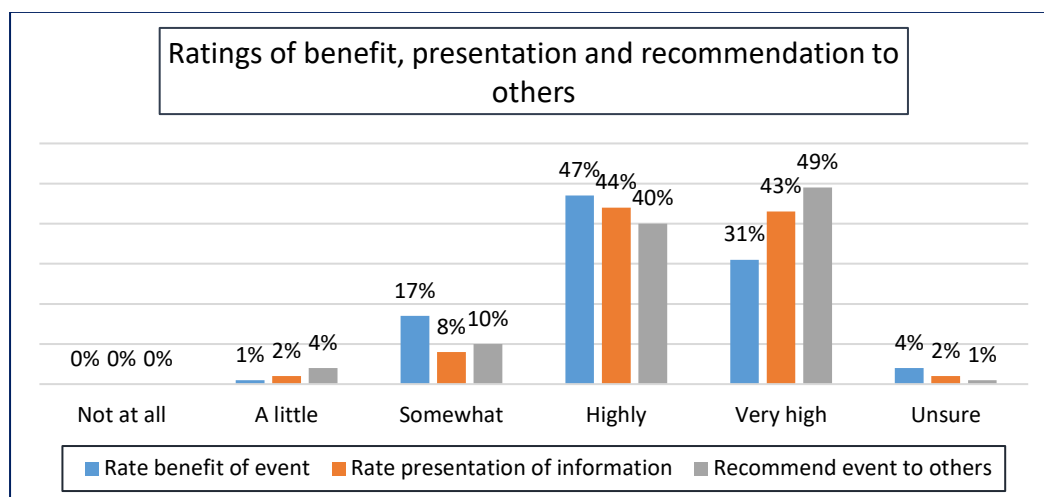


Figure 5

## 5. Discussion

These quantitative measurements indicate that the Enterprising Communities events were well received by the majority of participants that attended. The increase in awareness of community enterprise post event showed that the films and or facilitators achieved a key outcome in improving participant's knowledge of community enterprise.

The results also indicate that the increased understanding of community enterprise heightened the value participants placed on the relevance of the events and which the gaining of ideas may have also contributed to.

However a key point of discussion was the level of confidence in the future of the community which increased from 70% pre event to 85% post event. It could be speculated that the rather subdued level of confidence pre event was in part derived from participants recognising that their communities populations and more so that their youth population are declining.

A common refrain throughout the more inland outer regional and remote areas of the Wheatbelt is that they need to retain the youth. This was also reflected in comments by several participants at the various events who in response to the question asking people to list ideas, simply stated 'retain our young people' or words to that effect. While this is for all intents and purposes an outcome derived from a community enterprise and not an idea for one, the comment used in this context exemplifies a level of concern if not almost desperation.

Therefore it could be proposed that a marked upswing in confidence for the future of the community derived from the events could be regarded as much an impact as an outcome of the program.

In the following section, the report details the ideas and observations of elements of enablement or constraint within the communities that participants made in response to developing community enterprises that could revitalise and reinvigorate their communities.

## 6. Qualitative responses: Ideas, observations-advantages and constraints.

From an overall perspective, the people who attended the Enterprising Communities events were looking for solutions that could address the challenges confronting their communities. These challenges were creating a degree of concern ranging from taking action to mitigate an impending crisis derived from losing a local grocery outlet to doing something to forestall a crisis in the future.

As cited earlier in the document, the five locations that the RDAW REPS Officer attended, had in the case of four locations experienced a ten year decline in population and in one, a five year decline. Similarly in the other nine locations where events were held, two shires had shown no growth in population over ten years and two had registered a ten year decrease with one recording a 14% reduction.

For the most part the RDAW REPS Officer observed that the people who attended the events were there to proactively participate with a view to developing an enterprise or activity that would make a positive difference to their community. While there was also some marginal level of pessimism expressed during the events, there was no indication that any of the participants were prepared to give up on their community.

As such it could be proposed that the Enterprising Community events acted as a catalyst in both drawing communities together to publicly acknowledge the issues and develop strategies to address the issues.

### 6.1 Qualitative response frequencies

In total 75 participants at the various events listed 155 ideas representing an average of at least two ideas per person while a further 17 participants made 21 general observations about the process or what was needed to drive the process along with 30 participants who offered a final comment.

The 154 ideas and 21 general observations offered were coded into categories illustrated in table four and attributed a value as a percentage of the total number (176) of qualitative responses.

Table 4

Category	%
Community commitment/capacity	28%
Engaging youth	3%
Town scape and enterprises	4%
Events	18%
Built, managed and creative assets/activities	35%
Natural assets	6%
General	5%

#### 6.1.1 Community commitment/capacity and engaging youth

If community commitment/capacity is combined with engaging youth, it could be said that almost a third (31%) of the participants who responded identified community as a key element in developing and activating community enterprises. The following comments give an example of this.

*“Just one person to get things going. Community spirit.”*

*“Small town with plenty of drive.”*

*“Working together to maintain community events.”*

*“A project that gives the community a feel good attitude.”*

*“Utilising skills that are already existing in our community.”*

*“Key-what is it that the people are needing/Town needs to attract people- what's missing, what assets does the town have.”*

*“Encourage the young and inspire them to engage in making our town great again.”*

#### 6.1.2 Town scape and enterprises

At the same time many of those who responded recognised that their communities needed to address shortfalls in community services and amenities or promote the quality of their amenities and services to attract new residents and visitors.

Comments that drew attention to what could be improved in regard to the physical town scape included:

*“Highway- visual feature for the town- so achievable.”*

*“A feature throughout the shire-like, Kulin's tin horse highway.”*

*“Art in the main street.”*

*“Revamp the old (railway) station to create historic area.”*

*“Beautifying main street.”*

*“Uplifting the town.”*

#### 6.1.3 Events

Almost 20% of responses identified events as an option to revitalising and promoting their community. While many of the responses just suggested holding an event without specifying a theme, there were a number that suggested music festivals. However several participants had ideas for local themes such as:

*“A farming festival.”*

*A weekend that showcased local industry*

*“Market days.”*

Other ideas incorporated community needs such as a literary events and events specifically for women in the Wheatbelt along with a cultural day and a super community picnic.

#### *6.1.4 Built, managed and creative assets/activities*

However important concerns for many participants was the lack of hospitality and food services for community members and visitors as well as a shortage of overnight accommodation for visitors.

*“Reopen pub to make a decent place to go for dinner.”*

*“Co-Op group to buy (grocery) shop.”*

*“Community hub-roadhouse/café/restaurant.”*

*“Maybe need to buy back coffee shop and run as a community group as previously.”*

*“More accommodation- cottages.”*

*“Upgrade the accommodation for events.”*

*“Caravan park upgrade.”*

*“Get better accommodation for people to stay in town.”*

There were also suggestions to utilise and promote the creativity of local community members to enhance the aesthetics of the towns.

*“Popup shop for artists.”*

*“An area to display creative endeavour.”*

*“Artist space.”*

In addition there were ideas proposed to develop the infrastructure for bike trails and utilise a disused railway line spur as a rail trail.

#### *6.1.5 Natural assets*

Of some surprise was that only a very limited number of participants acknowledged the potential of the natural assets as an option in promoting visitation and their local area. The leading ideas for utilising the natural assets included wildflower trails, bush walks and extended hike and camping trails. However participants in two different towns identified the night sky as a potential attraction for visitors.

#### *6.1.6 General ideas and comments*

Many ideas and comments that were categorised in this section were more conceptualised in the context of thinking of what could influence the way community enterprises are developed. For instance, one participant observed that the community needs to develop an enterprise or activity that was:

*“Something to make the town a destination or a way to get to a destination.”*

In a similar vein another participant stated the importance of:

*“Finding a point of difference that sets our town apart no matter what.”*

While a third participant summarised the theory behind the process with the comment:

*“People will come if you give them something to come to.”*

Alternately a participant identified what they considered a major constraint to community enterprise development of reliable digital connectivity:

*“There is a need to improve mobile phone reception and connection to the internet.”*

This is a valid observation in terms of Wheatbelt communities being able to promote their communities, activities and events at regional, state, national and international levels and supported by a recent report compiled by RDAW on digital uptake and connectivity<sup>3</sup> in the region.

## 7. Observations and comments

In addition to ideas a number of participants offered some scoping observations and comments about the events and the enterprising community processes. Some of the responses demonstrated a level of pessimism but for the most part responses were optimistic in nature and or acknowledged the benefit of the program.

### 7.1 Not sure it will work?

From the comments of a few participants it was apparent that they were concerned or dubious that the program would deliver or in the community's capacity to carry the ideas through to reality as illustrated by the following comments:

*"What are we getting from this?" (Pre event comment)*

*"It will depend on the extent to which people commit to making a difference."*

*"Our community is much lower socio-economically than either XXX community or XXX Shire. My question is: Is there any correlation with socio-economic index and success of communities. I think we need to identify what the real problems are rather than make assumptions about what the problems are. Well done to the shire for starting the ball rolling."*

*"Unfortunately XXX Shire does not have community minded people in our town. When someone does something good, we suffer a bad tall poppy syndrome. We need to work out how to positivity in our community members to make our town survive. Our shire needs to take an interest in what is happening to the facilities in our town."*

### 7.2 It will work!

On the other hand the events had invigorated participant's outlooks and lifted their enthusiasm.

*"Most of the ideas have been kicked around for years. The difference this time is how we can progress the ideas into results."*

*"Great event- thank you. Motivation, motivation, motivation! Let's get this going."*

*"So fantastic to come together as a community to brainstorm. Loved it!!"*

*"Inspired to be independent and do something for the town. Thanks heaps. Brilliant. Let's get started. Don't be dictated to by government."*

*"Wonderful opportunity to discuss commitment of community regardless of the event and their support."*

Of note was that this was a similar response from one of the WA communities that had been the subject of the films. The community had been shown the films prior to the launch of the Enterprising Communities project with the overall response being that the community had been revitalised in regard to supporting existing enterprises and developing new options.

Of equal importance was the effect the events had in bringing different sections of each community together to work towards a shared objective.

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<sup>3</sup> RDAW, 2017. 2017 Revision of the 2013 RDA Wheatbelt Digital Action Plan.

*“Gives ideas and insight in to what other community members are thinking and would like to see happen.”*

*“At last a trigger for conservation.”*

*“I was unsure if people (The mix we had) would embrace the concept and delightfully surprised at the positivity of everyone.”*

These comments indicate that the events not only initiated ideas but acted as a catalyst in drawing diverse elements of each community together to develop and implement projects designed to make a difference to their communities or possibly make a different community. This influence of the events is illustrated in the following section that details immediate outcomes of the events.

## 8. Qualitative interviews

As part of the evaluation process semi structured interviews<sup>4</sup> were conducted with two community representatives from two of the shires that hosted events. The interviews were designed to gain an insight of the issues that were confronting the community, the effect of those issues on the community and the response of participants and the broader community to the Enterprising Community events.

### 8.1 Interview 1

Prior to events held in XXX, the interviewee listed a number of issues that were adversely impacting on communities in the shire and to a large extent depleted community morale. These issues included:

- Declining community engagement and involvement in community activities, organisations and events.
- Volunteer fatigue.
- Loss of youth, high numbers of 6-12 year olds, but few teenagers.
- No outlets for young people- activities, social events etc.
- Degradation of community support networks.
- Degradation of social/sport networks and groups. Fewer numbers and less people willing to volunteer for administrative positions.
- Loss of the football club was a serious setback.

In response to the barriers or constraints that may restrict development of community enterprises, the interviewee cited volunteer fatigue as a key constraint along with a lack of succession within community groups. The interviewee made the point that the lack of succession within the community groups was not only due to fewer people willing to take over leadership roles but also due to older leaders unwilling to stand aside to allow the entry of younger leaders with new or different ideas into the organisation.

Having detailed the issue and constraints the interviewee was asked what had been the response within the communities since the events. From an overall perspective the interviewee said responses had been positive and extended from a broader community reaction to specific community initiatives. The broader community reaction was shown in the reinvigoration of community progress groups. It was also noted by the interviewee that the ideas drive was creating more robust discussion in each of the communities.

In conclusion the interviewee felt that an immediate impact of the events had been that a sense of apathy that had increasingly pervaded the communities had been at least arrested if not turned around.

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<sup>4</sup> A copy of the semi structured question guide is detailed in appendices 3.

## 8.2 Interview 2

The interviewee felt that prior to the events being held there was a lack of confidence with a corresponding decline in hope within the community about the town future. This had been compounded by the potential loss of the town's store, which if not addressed, held serious consequences for the future sustainability of the town.

There was also an underlying expectation in the community that the shire Council needed to do more but what people expected was more than the shire could deliver or was outside its responsibility. This the interviewee identified as a constraint as people felt that it was not their responsibility. The other constraint identified was the presence of a cohort of people in the community who did not see any reason for action or change and would challenge any initiatives which added to the general inertia infiltrating the community.

However the interviewee believed there was a perceptible positive shift in the attitudes of the majority of the community since the events. What was notable, was the process that promoted shift, described by the interviewee as a ripple effect that subtly flowed through the community over a period of weeks after the events.

An example of the ripple effect given by the interviewee was in their words:

*"The surprising number of people who had not attended the events who were contacting the various groups that were formed to organise activities and offering their services."*

This type of response, the interviewee observed had been virtually non-existent prior to the Enterprising Community events.

Added to these responses were the formation of various groups or steering committees to develop ideas into actions or implement initiatives.

In reflecting on what had transpired over the six weeks since the events, the interviewee was somewhat surprised at the enthusiastic and proactive response of community members. While they expected there to be a positive response, they had not anticipated the range of ideas and how quickly people would act to progress ideas through to reality. Additionally the interviewee was surprised in the perceptible lift in confidence within the community along with a rise in a 'can do' attitude and the way people were, well after the events, continuing to have conversations in the street and at social gatherings. As the interviewee observed, for the five weeks after the events, the main topics of conversations in most social settings were around what could be done and how it could be done.

## 9. Overarching outcomes

This section examines the overarching outcomes as an aggregation of all the Enterprising Community Events that were held. The Cambridge online Dictionary<sup>5</sup> defines an outcome as *"a result or effect of an action, situation etc..."* In many respects an outcome is similar to an 'impact' however it should be recognised that an impact is as described by the online Cambridge Dictionary: *"a powerful effect, especially something new, has on a situation or person."* In effect for the most part, it could be said that outcomes are derived from actions that leads to an impact or series of impacts.

### 9.1 Outcomes

Using these definitions as a basis for evaluating the overarching outcomes and immediate (short term) impacts of the Enterprising Communities Program in the Wheatbelt, this assessment focuses on the

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<sup>5</sup> <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/outcome>



program as a whole rather than on each individual event. In respect to each individual event, the derived actions, outcomes and where reported, impacts, are tabled in the appendices of this report.

From an overarching perspective the action of initiating the Enterprising Communities Program in the Wheatbelt by RDAW resulted in 13<sup>6</sup> of the 42 Wheatbelt Shires hosting events either as a shire or community organisation initiative. As a consequence, the program reached 487 people which represented 3.5% of the total population of the 13 shires. Of more importance was that the program was delivered in eight shires that had registered a decline in population and one shire that had no increase in population between 2011 and 2016<sup>7</sup>.

There were three key outcomes that were expressed in the summaries of events and follow-up feedback from organisers, which were common to all shires where the events had been held<sup>8</sup>. These were: a lift in enthusiasm and a flow of ideas; desire to initiate community level action and increased interaction between the different demographics that make up the communities.

The subjective observations of the authors, of a lift in enthusiasm and flow of ideas is supported by responses in the pre and post evaluations that were completed at eight of the events. As two participants commented in their post event evaluation:

*"Anything is possible."*

*"Possibilities are endless- think outside the box!"*

While another wrote:

*"Very informative. Some great ideas came from the forum."*

Similarly there was an expressed enthusiasm and desire to start the enterprising processes as a community and action the ideas as illustrated in the following comments.

*"Just one person to get things going. Community spirit!"*

*"Small town with plenty of drive"*

*"Get things happening without the shire!"*

But arguably perhaps the most important outcome from the events was the unification of those attending, irrespective of age, economic status or any other demographic characteristics that delineate social sub structures in communities. This was observed by the RDAW REPS Officer in the workshop events that he attended where he noted that a shared or common idea overrode any differences in demographic characteristics. An observation borne out in the ensuing comments drawn from the participants evaluations:

*"(The event)<sup>9</sup> Gives ideas and insight in to what other community members are thinking and would like to see happen."*

*"So fantastic to come together as a community to brainstorm. Loved it!!"*

*"Good forum for community ideas, well presented."*

*"Wonderful opportunity to discuss commitment of community regardless of the event and their support."*

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<sup>6</sup> Shires

<sup>7</sup> ABS 2016. Census of Population and Housing: Time Series Profiles; LGAs, Catalogue number 2003.0

<sup>8</sup> Event report summaries.

<sup>9</sup> Authors insertion

However perhaps the one comment that succinctly summarises this bring together of community was that of an event organiser at an event where there was limited social commonality between what was in effect the two main groups of participants<sup>10</sup>.

*“I was unsure if people (The mix we had) would embrace the concept and was delightfully surprised at the positivity of everyone.”*

To give the comment context it is important to describe demographic characteristics present of the groups. The smaller group of participants were aged between 18 and 34 and were mainly female whereas the larger group were aged 55 and over with a high contingent of over 65 year olds with a greater representation of males. Yet despite these disparities the younger and older participants worked together on a variety ideas, many of which are progressing to implementation.

These outcomes as defined by The Cambridge Dictionary as *“a result or effect of an action, situation etc...”* indicate that it should be anticipated that an impact, defined by the same source as *“a powerful effect, especially something new, has on a situation or person.”* is occurring or will follow. The immediate impact(s) and potential future impacts derived from the program are described and discussed in the following section.

## 10. Impacts

Impacts of a program such as Enterprising Communities take the forms of powerful tangible and intangible effects and can occur at varying societal levels ranging from family, community, and regional out to the broader state and national levels. For the purpose of this report only the impacts on the community will be examined.

### 10.1 The green shoots of effect and change

From one perspective it could be reasonably argued that it is too soon after the events to gauge if community responses are the result of an action (the events) or a powerful effect of the events. However the comments of the two community representatives that were interviewed along with other comments made to the RDAW REPS Officer in the days and weeks following the events point to a growing effect within the communities.

Based on the experiences of other communities, for community enterprises to have an impact there is a need for the majority of the community to not only engage but socially and emotionally invest in the enterprise. At the same time, the enterprises need to be conduits that promote and nurture the organic evolution of an enterprising culture through the development and expansion of interconnected synergies within communities.

Perhaps the best illustration of this is the Kulin experience as shown in the Kulin Enterprise film. The major impact of Kulin’s many community enterprises is not derived from the enterprises themselves. Rather it is the processes involved in developing and maintaining the enterprises that are driven by the human and social capital which have established strong social synergies within the community.

For example while there are derived beneficial social and economic outcomes form the Kulin Bush Races, the main impact began to be derived when the diverse elements of the Kulin community initially gathered together to develop strategies to address the crisis they were facing. In essence,

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<sup>10</sup> This event was attended by the RDAW REPS Officer who prior to the event commencing, thought that the broad divergence in demographic characteristics between the two groups could have negatively affected the event.

those first initial meetings 22 years ago laid the foundations for a 'powerful effect' to occur in the community.

It could be posited that this was because in the first instance, the crisis (a severe population decline) was not only the shire's concern but everyone's and therefore in the second instance, finding solutions rested with everyone in the community. This required community members to have conversations with each other and to work together collaboratively. Therefore it may be proposed that those initial meetings and conversations 22 years ago, 'effected' a change in the community's mind set. This in turn has empowered the Kulin community and led to establishing an innovative enterprising culture in the Shire.

So it could be said for the communities that participated in the Enterprising Communities program, that the same processes have been initiated in that conversations have been started and groups are forming to work together to implement actions. This is supported by the comments contained in some of the individual event reports as well as observations of the two interview participants in addition to participant and organiser feedback after the events. For example, comments of two organisers in their event reports, suggest the beginnings of a 'powerful effect' as a result of the events. As one organiser noted:

*"One of the most noticeable for me as the manager of XXX is seeing the traditional hierarchal group process being discarded and a 'whole of' collaborative process replacing this. Facilitated conversations certainly allowed a safe space for community to mend and/or build new bridges to allow collaboration.*

*The enterprising Communities Program has allowed the XXX community the opportunity to look at what can be achieved by small rural towns, and kick started a process to nurture and bring both economic and social change to our town. Inspiration was a vital part of this process and the film viewings certainly sparked flames that are were the catalyst to starting conversations full of passion."*

While the second organiser observed:

*"The atmosphere at the end of the forum was very different from the start of the evening when people chose to sit in their respective groups and were unsure of the potential of the forum. By evening end we were delighted to see animated conversations, new connections forged as community members appreciated that they shared many similar ideas and had the same drive and commitment to bring about a fresher, vibrant, invigorated XXX."*

Added to these comments were those of the other organisers during the informal follow-up process conducted by phone three to four weeks after the events. When they were asked: 'how things had been going since the event?', all had noticed a growing level of conversation and discussion about activities and enterprises across their communities. Additionally the majority of organisers felt there was what they described as a developing sense of empowerment that had not been present in their communities or they had noticed before the events. The word, 'empowerment' or 'empowering' was also regularly used by participants when they were having informal discussions with the RDAW REPS Officer at the events he attended.

In as much as these responses point to the beginnings of a broader impact within the communities and the region, it would be disingenuous at this time, to claim the program has delivered a long lasting impact. As with any project or program, the full scale of the impact or the type of impact only becomes apparent with the passage of the time. However at this point, it would be reasonable to suggest that the program has evoked changes that have the potential to influence a positive impact within and between communities in the Wheatbelt.

## 11. Conclusion

The evaluation has shown that the Enterprising Communities program has delivered in terms of outputs and beneficial outcomes and there is a sound likelihood that it will also deliver positive impacts. From one perspective it could be proposed that the program was a catalyst in bringing communities together for a common purpose, being not just to survive but to prevail. Similarly it could be said that the program was a catalyst in enabling communities to be the architects of their own solutions and their community's future.

This is shown from both responses in the post evaluation sheets and the follow-up feedback. In the first instance, the program has brought a realisation into communities that solutions to their various issues lay more with the community than external influences. As a result, at the very least, the program in some communities, has started the conversations that need to be had and in other communities, acted as a galvanising mechanism to initiate action.

Essentially the success of the program has been derived from the facilitated extension (delivery) approach that has enabled a 'ground up' response to exploring and finding solutions to specific community issues. As such the facilitated process has engaged proactive community participation that even within a short space time is delivering community led activities and event planning.

Given the initial positive outcomes and the immediate impacts the program has delivered through the facilitated approach, it could be proposed that the Enterprising Communities program has delivered value for money.

The simplicity, adaptability and flexibility of the Enterprising Communities Program lends itself as a model that, with minimal cost, could be used by smaller communities across regional and remote Australia to encourage community driven social and economic development.

## Appendices

### Appendices 1. Pre-event evaluation sheet

<b>Gender</b>		
Male	Female	Other

<b>Age</b>						
Less than 18 years	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+

<b>Please indicate the shire or town you live in.</b>	

<b>1) In what capacity within your community are you attending this workshop?</b>				
Individual member	community	Community organisation representative	Shire representative	Other

<b>2) Did you attend an Enterprising Community Film event? <i>(If yes, please go to question 4)</i></b>	
Yes	No

<b>3) Before attending this workshop, were you aware of community enterprise development?</b>					
Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Yes	Definitely	Unsure

<b>4) Do you think this workshop has relevance for your community?</b>					
Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Yes	Definitely	Unsure

<b>5) How optimistic are you about the future of your community?</b>					
Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Optimistic	Very optimistic	Unsure

**Any other comments**

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*Thank you for completing this evaluation.*

## Appendices 2. Post-event evaluation sheet

<b>Gender</b>			<b>Shire or town that you live in.</b>		
Male	Female	Other			

<b>Age</b>						
Less than 18 years	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+

<b>6) In what capacity within your community are you attending this event?</b>					
Individual member	community	Community representative	organisation	Shire representative	Other

<b>7) Do you know more about community enterprise development?</b>					
Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Yes	Definitely	Unsure

<b>8) Did you think this event has relevance for your community?</b>					
Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Yes	Definitely	Unsure

<b>9) Has the event given you any ideas for community enterprise development activities that could be run in your community?</b>					
Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Yes	Definitely	Unsure

Could you list some of the ideas you have that have been inspired by the films?

- a. ....
- b. ....
- c. ....

<b>10) Are you more optimistic about the future of your community are you now, having attended this event?</b>					
Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Yes	Definitely	Unsure

<b>11) How would you rate the overall benefit of the event?</b>					
Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Highly	Very highly	Unsure

<b>12) How would you rate the presentation of the information?</b>					
Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Highly	Very highly	Unsure

<b>13) Would you recommend this type of event to people in other communities?</b>					
Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Highly	Very highly	Unsure

Any other comments.....  
 .....  
 .....

*Thank you for completing this evaluation.*

### Appendices 3. Enterprising Communities semi structured interview questions and prompts

- 1) What social issues in the community would you identify as important?
- 2) What would you consider to be the major challenges your community faces in ensuring its sustainability?
- 3) Do community organisations or the community as a whole run any enterprises and or events that deliver beneficial social outcomes to the community?
- 4) How would you describe your community's social culture? (How community members work together to achieve a beneficial outcome for the community)

#### Prompt

People are ready to volunteer to organise activities and there are plenty of volunteers- hard to get people to commit and contribute etc.

- 5) Do you see a community enterprise or activities/ events as an approach to address the issues and challenges the community faces?
- 6) What do you think offers the best option or combination of options for your community to develop as a community enterprise?

#### Prompt

- Community investment and/or ownership of a revenue generating enterprise(s)
  - An annual community event/activity that attracts visitors from other areas
  - A series of smaller events/activities that occur through the year
- 7) What barriers or constraints could you see restricting the development of a community enterprise or events?
  - 8) Would there be any issues that you could see restricting the impact of beneficial outcomes for the community?
  - 9) What has been the response within the community since the events?