



Westpac Australian Community Idol 2007

Address to the Communities in Control Conference
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(Gulargambone, NSW):
2007 Westpac Australian Community Idol Winner

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Thank you and congratulations to the other finalists.

We have a movie to show you. The movie lasts for seven minutes, which means that I've got three minutes to very quickly tell you as much as I can.

Gulargambone is a small country town in the middle of NSW. There are 500 people in the town, 30% of whom are Indigenous. It's a classic story, as you saw from Bernard Salt – we're one of the 17%. Agricultural commodity prices dropped, the banks left town, businesses closed, services declined. We've had a lot of empty shops in the main street and things have been pretty grim. Persistent drought hasn't helped.

In 1999 we were told that our post office was going to close and as a result the community decided to fight back. They said enough was enough and we bought the post office. But that's another story.

Then we did a strategic plan for the town. We purchased a dilapidated building in the main street which we wanted to turn into a tourist information centre because we thought tourism could be a potential saviour. This was a bit naïve on our part because we realised we actually needed to do something for the community first. So we turned this hall into a community centre, which now operates as a café. It's now open four days a week. It has a gallery, it's got a craft shop where locals can sell their craft and make money for themselves, which is fantastic during the drought, it's a function centre for the community as well as for visitors, and we do catering.

The Coonamble Council asked us if we would incorporate the town library into the project, so we now do storytelling sessions during the school holidays.

Vittoria Coffee came on board and sponsored us.

We have monthly movie nights, which is a great way of getting people together for a low-cost social outing.

We did a town branding exercise and picked the gallah as our town logo and the community made 40 corrugated iron galahs which now line the approaches to town.

And the whole lot has combined to bring people to town and stimulate some economic development.

However it hasn't just done that. You'll see in the working bees we actually chose to involve the kids and a lot of the kids that came were the Indigenous kids. And our proudest achievement is that many of those kids now are working in the café as part of their hospitality course through the local central school.

So I'm going to leave the movie to tell the story, but I should just end by saying we're all volunteers and all the profits go back into the community. And I'd also like to acknowledge Sara Storer who allowed us to use the music in this movie.

Thank you very much.

[Movie runs]

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