

OUR VISION

Vibrant and
sustainable
communities through
local leadership

2025 Yearbook

Thank you to Our Supporters

Alpine Valleys Community Leadership gratefully acknowledges the contributions of our supporters. Their valuable support truly makes a difference in developing our region's leaders.



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 Ethical Fields
 Gardiner Foundation
 Gateway Health
 Housing Matters Action Group (Bellingen)
 Mansfield Adult Community Education (MACE)
 Mansfield Autism Statewide Services

Member for Indi – Helen Haines MP
 Member for Ovens Valley – Tim McCurdy MP
 Murray Regional Tourism
 Porepunkah Relief & Recovery Committee
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 Rob Carolane, Twin Prism Consulting
 Story Up
 Susan Benedyka
 The Hermitage Dairy

The Mandala Project
 Tomorrow Today Foundation
 Totally Renewable Yackandandah
 Towong Shire Council
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 Victoria Police
 Yackandandah Community Development Company (YCDCO)



2025 has been a year of focus, consolidation, and growth for Alpine Valleys Community Leadership (AVCL.)

Welcome

We have continued to evolve – deepening our impact, broadening our reach, and remaining firmly grounded in the needs, aspirations, and opportunities of the communities we serve. Our 2024–2027 strategy continues to guide this work, shaping the choices we make and the direction we take.

Over the past twelve months, we have engaged more than 350 individuals across 13 local government areas in North East Victoria, Southern and Border NSW. Our efforts have centred on building capability through four major leadership programs – the flagship Annual Program, the Upper Murray Community Leadership Program, the Fischer Community Leadership Program, and Amplify Myrtleford – each designed to strengthen local capacity in different ways. Alongside these, our All Hands on Deck workshop series created space for focused learning and collaboration, drawing people together to build their capacity to respond during times of disaster. We also delivered a range of projects and workshops, both online and in person, extending opportunities for people to build confidence, share experience, and strengthen their networks across the region.

This year has also been defined by the way we work with and alongside others. Our joint scholarship initiative with the Regional Disability Advocacy Service

sought to remove barriers to participation, enabling people with disability to take part in the 2026 Annual Program. Thank you to all who contributed and donated.

We have also collaborated with the eight other regional Community Leadership organisations and Leadership Victoria to explore how deeper cooperation could enhance our collective impact.

None of what we have achieved this year would be possible without the people behind it. We extend our sincere thanks to our Board for their stewardship and governance, to our staff and facilitators for their skill and commitment, and to our partners and funders for their trust and support. Crucially, we thank our community members – whose ideas, energy, and determination remain a driving force behind this work.

We will continue to focus on what matters most – responding to evolving needs, strengthening capability, and creating the conditions for leadership to take root where it's needed most.

Madeline Hines, Executive Officer

2024 – 2027

Strategy

Impact

Build the leadership capacity and resilience of local communities by

- Offering meaningful, accessible and inclusive programs.
- Equipping local people with leadership skills, confidence and connections.
- Identifying and offering pathways for people to continue their leadership journey.

Identity

Be a trusted steward of local leadership by

- Fostering partnerships that increase access, opportunity and outcomes.
- Enabling the participation of all people within our program offerings.

Investment

Ensure we are well resourced to continue growing the leadership capacity and voices of people and communities by

- Attracting, nurturing and retaining skilled and dedicated Board and team members.
- Securing our financial stability through innovative and diversified income sources.
- Articulating the impact of our work.



A leader is best when people barely know he exists.
When his work is done, his aim fulfilled,
they will say: we did it ourselves.



Our Values

Excellence

In the development and delivery of our activities

Agility

Being proactive and relevant to the changing needs of our communities

Innovation

Fostering creative ideas and identifying opportunities to strengthen our communities

Collaboration

Building relationships and partnerships that deliver mutual benefit and value

Integrity

Displaying transparency and accountability to our stakeholders

Respect

Conducting our relationships with honesty, trust and compassion

Our Mission:
Grow the leadership
capacity and voice
of people and communities

2025

Board and Staff



Steve Belli
Chair



Sophie Enders
Deputy Chair



Ameer Jhingoor
Treasurer



Elise Hill
Board Member



Megan Hunt
Board Member



Dave Armstrong
Board Member



Konrad Kucianski
Board Member



Annie Volkering
Board Member



Arno Parolini
Board Member



Madeline Hines
Executive Officer



Irene Pritchard
Programs Manager



Billie Robertson
Programs Officer
departed July 2025



Patron's Message

Leadership has always been about vision, courage, and the ability to inspire others toward a shared purpose. It is also about readiness: the capacity to meet uncertainty with intention, to hold steady amid complexity, and to equip ourselves and our communities to navigate change when it arrives.

When the flagship program was first established in 1998, it was sparked by the words of a futurist who told us that the pace of change would accelerate, and that communities would need people prepared to lead through it. At the time, that vision felt bold. Today, it feels undeniable, perhaps even prophetic. We stand in a world shaped by shifting climates, demographic transformation, volatile geopolitics, and accelerating technology. The question is not whether change will come, but how we will respond to it, and who we will choose to become in the process.

Among the forces shaping this moment, artificial intelligence is emblematic. It offers real possibilities: deeper insight, sharper decision-making, new forms of creativity, and ways of connecting that once belonged to science fiction. In drawing on AI to prepare this message, I was reminded that leadership is as much about evolving with change as it is about guiding others through it. Yet, as with every leap forward, AI also brings profound ethical challenges. Tools that expand human potential can deepen inequality; technology that amplifies knowledge can distort truth; innovation that accelerates progress can erode trust. Leadership is therefore not about harnessing power, it is about interrogating it, directing it, and ensuring it serves people and strengthens the social fabric rather than fraying it.

As Patron, I reflect on the fact that leadership is not a title but a responsibility. It is about shaping cultures of trust, creating conditions where innovation serves the common good, and holding fast to the principles that make progress meaningful. Whatever the future holds, and whatever tools we use to meet it, our enduring task remains the same: to lead with courage, curiosity, and conscience.

To all our graduates, you now inherit that task. The foresight that inspired the inception of this organisation more than two decades ago is now yours to carry forward. The world does not need leaders who know all the answers; it needs leaders who are willing to grapple with complexity, to ask the right questions, and to act with integrity even when the path ahead is uncertain.

John Brown, AO

My mantra,
which I offer
for your
adoption,
remains ten
two-letter
words: "If it is
to be, it is up
to me."



John Brown, AO
Patron

Chair's Report



We continue to reach more people each year, a sign not only of the ongoing need for leadership opportunities, but of the deep trust communities place in AVCLP to deliver them. That trust is the foundation of our impact, and it's something we as a Board are deeply proud of.



Leadership doesn't stand still, and neither does our organisation. For over 25 years we have strived to meet the moment – adapting as communities shift and holding firm to our purpose.

Our focus has been on ensuring stability and sustainability while remaining flexible to the changing context. Strong governance and financial stewardship remain central, but our strategy also commits us to being responsive – shaping programs that reflect local realities, widening access, and demonstrating the tangible value of this work to the region.

We take pride in our Alumni who step up across committees, councils, action groups and workplaces, and in our partners and funders who recognise that developing local leadership is one of the most effective investments in community strength. It's like our undercover public relations department, and we certainly rely on this network to support our mission. Best of all, we add to it each year, which brings even more experience and diversity.

Congratulations to the graduates of all our 2025 programs. I am sure the learnings and experiences that have been bestowed on you will allow growth and continue to provide your community with direction and leadership in times when it is needed most.

On behalf of the Board, I also extend thanks to the many people and organisations who made this year possible:

- our Executive Officer Madeline Hines who always steps up to the challenge and supports the Board in so many ways
- our staff who deliver with professionalism, integrity and care
- the Federal, NSW and Victorian governments for targeted program funding the local councils across North East Victoria and Southern New South Wales who championed our work
- employers who backed their staff to participate
- philanthropic partners who provided scholarships and support
- Alumni who continue to lead and encourage new participants
- the many presenters, venue hosts, service providers and collaborators who contributed their time and expertise.

With the support of our partners and the commitment of our communities, we are not only delivering programs – we are helping leadership flourish across the region. That is the investment we share, and it is the contribution we will continue to make.

Steve Belli
Chair

Executive Officer's Report

The past year has asked a lot of people. The pace of change, the pressure on communities, and the weight of competing priorities have made progress hard-won. And yet, again and again, I've seen people show up – trying, adapting, and refusing to walk away from the work of making things better.



Across the region, care remains a constant – woven into the way communities operate, and expressed most powerfully through leadership. It's shaped every day by people responding to change, finding solutions, and building the future they want to see. That reality underpins everything we do.

This year, our efforts have focused on deepening that capacity and widening the spaces where it can thrive. To everyone who has taken part in our programs, workshops, projects and initiatives, thank you. Stepping into any kind of learning takes openness and effort, and I hope the experience has served you well. The curiosity, insight, and care you've brought to this work continue to strengthen what we do and the difference it makes.

Our role is to support that momentum and make more of it possible, and it would be remiss not to acknowledge that none of this happens in isolation. The relationships and trust that sustain this work are deeply rooted in place. They're built across councils, community groups, alumni, governments, funders, partners, and countless individuals.

The exchange of ideas and experience between them continues to challenge and strengthen us, reminding us that learning and leadership are shared endeavours.

To remain part of this vital network, we also need to keep strengthening ourselves. This year we've focused on maintaining and growing the foundations that allow us to continue showing up for the region, including launching a new website, beginning work on an updated monitoring and evaluation framework, and taking steps to support long-term stability and resiliency. We've also worked alongside Leadership Victoria and the eight other regional Community Leadership organisations to explore new ways of collaborating and extending our collective impact across the state.

While what we deliver changes as circumstances evolve, the spirit of our work remains constant: to back people to lead in ways that reflect their own communities and priorities. That commitment continues as we look ahead – to creating the conditions that make leadership possible, connecting people both within and beyond programs, opening new pathways in workplaces and communities, and sharpening our understanding of how this work creates change.

Leadership already lives here. With the right support, it will continue to grow, adapt, and shape the story of this region.

Madeline Hines
Executive Officer

Programs, Projects & Workshops

All Hands On Deck: Supporting Spontaneous Volunteers

All Hands on Deck was a series of five workshops held across Federation, Greater Hume and Snowy Valleys Councils, attended by more than 160 people who came to build their skills, confidence and understanding of how to volunteer safely and effectively in times of crisis.

Led by facilitator Mary Hoodless and supported by the NSW Reconstruction Authority, each session involved contributions from NSW SES, NSW Rural Fire Service, Australian Red Cross, Rural Adversity Mental Health Program, local councils, Rural Financial Counselling Service NSW, NBN Australia and other local organisations.

The workshops focused on the practical realities of volunteering during disaster events, including safety, coordination, and how community

efforts align with official emergency responses. Evaluation results showed a clear impact: the proportion of participants who strongly felt they had the skills to volunteer safely rose from 58% to 83%, and those who strongly agreed they knew how to support a coordinated response increased from 54% to 87%. Overall, 91% reported confidence levels of 7 or above on a 10-point scale, with almost a third rating their confidence at the highest level.

The sessions also strengthened relationships between agencies and communities, laying the groundwork for collaborative responses in future situations. Thanks to all contributing organisations for their time and support in delivering the series.

Powering Up Community Groups – Temora and Bland Shire Councils

Powering Up Community Groups was delivered in Temora and Bland Shire Councils to support volunteer and community groups to strengthen governance, improve digital capability, and build confidence in their ongoing operations.

Across two days, workshops provided practical strategies for sustainable management, volunteer engagement and succession planning, grant writing and use of digital tools. Thanks to Mary Hoodless for facilitation, and Tammy Atkins for delivering a Digital 101 segment.





Upper Murray Community Leadership Program

The Upper Murray Community Leadership Program continued in 2025 as part of a three-year initiative supported by Emergency Management Victoria. The program is delivered in partnership with Upper Murray Inc. and builds capacity for leadership, adaptive thinking and collaboration.

Led by facilitators Chris Mirams and Dr Gary Saliba, the program supported participants to explore leadership in context – beginning with understanding themselves and expanding to systems, identity, community and change. Sessions focused on practical tools for navigating complexity and leading effectively, and provided opportunities for shared learning and reflection.

A highlight of the program was the study tour to Tasmania, which connected participants with a range of regional initiatives and approaches to community development, agritourism, employment, small business, and agriculture. Site visits included Blue Derby mountain biking, the Floating Sauna Lake Derby, Bridestowe Lavender, Barnbougles Dunes, Lot 40 Derby, Blue Derby Foundation, Landfall Angus and Tasmania Feedlot.

Congratulations to the 2025 graduates: Brooke Anderson, Anthony Dore, Edward Durham, Bryan Green, Nick Herring, Carley Hodge, Sarah Lebner, David Mitchell, Chloe Mitchell, William Nankervis, Jillianne Roberts and Anna Paton.



AICD Governance Foundations for the Not-for-Profit Director

In partnership with Goulburn Murray Community Leadership, we hosted Governance Foundations for the Not-for-Profit Director in Benalla, a one-day course delivered by the Australian Institute of Company Directors.

The program provided clear, practical tools for those serving – or seeking to serve – on not-for-profit boards and committees. Congratulations to the 16 participants, and with thanks to DEECA for hosting the training.

Youth Listening Project

Supported by the Kyamba Foundation, this project aims to better understand how young people view volunteering and community involvement, and what enables or prevents their participation.

Through conversations and listening sessions being undertaken by Mel and Anthony Nicholson of The Mandala Project, young people are sharing their insights into the barriers, opportunities and changes that would make contributing to community life more accessible and meaningful.

This work will continue over coming months, and we look forward to sharing the insights with our community groups and partners.



Fischer Community Leadership Program

The Fischer Community Leadership Program was delivered under its current funding arrangements for a final time, supporting grassroots leadership development within Federation and Greater Hume Councils. Facilitated by Mary Hoodless, auspiced by Border Trust, and funded by the NSW Government's Stronger Country Communities Fund in partnership with Federation and Greater Hume councils, the program took place in Howlong.

Combining in-person and online sessions with practical learning experiences, participants took part in panel discussions with local leaders, project management training, and sessions exploring leadership across community, government and business.

The program culminated in presentations of participant-led

projects designed to meet local needs and opportunities.

Projects included a cultural event at Corowa Golf Club, upgrades to the Walbundrie Tennis Club and Burrumbuttock Recreation Reserve, stewardship planning for the Howlong Natural Environment Parklands, and the establishment of a Federation Astronomy and Extraterrestrial Interest Group.

Congratulations to our 2025 graduates: Roya Arya, Georgia Backhouse, Marj Bolanio Masayon, Annette Borradales, Sandra Broz, Viv Buli, Lisa Burns, Letiza Carillaga, Martin Clarke, Sue Collins, Tim Doherty, Santa Fabia and Sam Green.

With thanks to Greater Hume Council, Federation Council, Border Trust, Justin Clancy MP, and the program advisory group for their contributions and support.

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, concerned citizens can change world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has.

— Margaret Mead

A leader is one who knows the way,
goes the way, and shows the way.

— John Maxwell



Amplify Myrtleford Community Leadership Program

The Amplify Myrtleford Community Leadership Program was made possible through Regional Development Victoria's Tiny Towns Fund and Alpine Shire Council, supporting locals to Myrtleford and surrounds to develop the skills, confidence and connections to lead in their community.

Facilitated by Susan Benedyka with support from Suz Christison, sessions focused on practical leadership tools and collaborative approaches, including decision-making under pressure, working across different perspectives, and leading through uncertainty. The cohort also visited the Ovens Incident Control Centre, where they learned about how local knowledge, coordination and trust shape emergency response in the region.

The program concluded with a crisis simulation exercise that allowed participants to apply what they had learned alongside community stakeholders. A celebration followed, with graduation certificates presented by Alpine Shire Council Mayor Sarah Nicholas, AVCL Deputy Chair Sophie Enders, and Fiona Nicholls from Into Our Hands Community Foundation and GROW Myrtleford+.

Congratulations to graduates, including Janine Milne, Sean Hynes, Margaret Phillips, Leesa Borsi, Jocelyn Ceccanti, Daniel Pusvaciētis and Sylvie Huigen. With thanks to the program advisory group for their input and guidance, volunteers who participated in the mock crisis, Karen Van Huizen and Duryarne Streat from Alpine Shire Council, and all program partners for their support.



Drought, Disruption and the Drive to Adapt Workshop

Supported by the Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal (FRRR) through the Future Drought Fund, this workshop during April brought together 40 attendees – including AVCLP participants, Alumni and community members – to explore how local leadership can shape community responses to drought and disruption.

Facilitated by Maree Grenfell and Agriculture Victoria's Graeme Anderson, the day combined expert insight, systems thinking and collaborative discussion to examine how the changing climate intersects with economic pressure, social cohesion and community wellbeing. Attendees explored current and projected trends, the social and structural barriers that undermine local preparedness, and the informal leadership and social capital that enable communities to adapt.

Through the "Go, Stop, Think" process, participants identified practical actions – from improving digital accessibility and providing childcare to re-engaging older generations as knowledge-holders – that build the connections and capacity needed to weather future challenges. The workshop highlighted the value of inclusive systems, simplified processes, and small-scale community initiatives that build momentum and collective agency.

Evaluation results reflected strong impacts on participants' understanding of drought risk, resilience frameworks and social capital strategies, and offered valuable insights into where further support and applied tools could strengthen community preparedness.

With thanks to Wangaratta Turf Club for hosting the event.

Program Manager's Report



To the 2025 cohort: it has been a privilege to witness your growth in confidence, skills, vulnerability, and leadership.



What a brilliant year it has been for the Annual Program. We continued to honour the core of our mission, immersing the cohort in a vibrant learning atmosphere that took us across eight LGAs in North East Victoria and the Border region.

Sessions were guided by regional priorities and local issues, complemented by a mix of online technical skill sessions and in-person workshops that created a well-rounded structure. The content was both relevant and new for many participants, reflecting the diversity of our communities and the challenges and opportunities they face.

The cohort brought a tremendous diversity of thoughts, opinions, and experiences, building strong connections within the group. Each person offered unique strengths, stories, and wisdom, creating a supportive environment that encouraged growth, self-awareness, and connection. It's been inspiring to witness their journeys – from the opening retreat, where imposter syndrome was commonplace, to the emergence of far more self-assured and confident leaders.

The program's core elements remain rigorous and continue to define its essence and impact. The Turning Points presentations challenged participants to be vulnerable, enhance their public speaking skills, raise awareness of personal bias, deepen empathy, and explore how to inspire and influence others. This component offered meaningful growth and learning opportunities for us all. The group inquiry projects also brought real challenges, requiring participants to navigate diverse personalities and focus on collaborative processes as much as outcomes.

Once again, we were supported by a fantastic range of guest speakers and facilitators who generously shared their time, knowledge, and personal leadership journeys. Many contributed their time to the program, for which we are deeply grateful. Their generosity continues to strengthen not only the program, but the broader community.

I'd like to acknowledge the incredible work and input of the AVCL community who make this undertaking possible. This support enables us to continue delivering dynamic and impactful offerings in our region. In particular, I'd like to thank the tireless efforts of our Executive Officer, Madeline Hines; our recently departed Programs Officer, Billie Robertson; our dedicated Board; and our alumni.

To the 2025 cohort: it has been a privilege to witness your growth in confidence, skills, vulnerability, and leadership. I've been inspired by your self-awareness and the courage you've shown in recognising blind spots and embracing challenges. I've also had the opportunity to learn so much from each of you, allowing me to grow as both a facilitator and a human.

I look forward to seeing where your leadership journey takes you. Know that you are not alone—you have not only the 2025 cohort right by your side, but also the greater AVCL community.

Congratulations on your achievements.

Irene Pritchard
Program Manager

2025 Annual Program

Launch Event

Thursday 13th February 2025
Supported by Charles Sturt University, Wangaratta

The event brought together the new cohort with workplace funders, scholarship sponsors, supporters, partners, and government representatives, including Member for Ovens Valley Tim McCurdy and Rural City of Wangaratta Mayor Irene Grant.

Speakers: Caz Sammon and Cr Allison Winters, AVCLP Alumni

Topic: Reflections on their leadership journeys, the challenges and opportunities they encountered, and how the program has shaped their approach to leadership.

Speaker: Helen Haines MP (message delivered on behalf of Alumni and Federal Member for Indi)

Topic: Words of encouragement and support for the incoming cohort.

Speaker: John Brown AO, Patron

Topic: Launch of the 2025 program, including insights into its origins and the enduring legacy it continues to build.

Opening Retreat

Friday 21st and Saturday 22nd February 2025
Quercus Neighbourhood House & Old
Beechworth Gaol

Speakers: Irene Pritchard, Susan Benedyka and Gianna Verdini-Fensom (Guest Facilitators)

Topic: Self-reflection, awareness, relationship-building, collaboration, and building leadership capacity through facilitated sessions on personal awareness and group dynamics.

Speakers: The Mandala Project

Topic: Outdoor team challenges designed to strengthen collaboration and trust within the cohort.

Speakers: Diarmuid Kelly and Sarah Glass, AVCLP Alumni

Topic: Leadership journeys and insights from past participants.

Speakers: Maria Kraus and Ben Kraus, Bridge Road Brewers

Topic: Local enterprise, innovation, economic sustainability, and staying true to purpose.

Regional Economy

Friday 21st March 2025
Brown Brothers Milawa Winery, Milawa

Speaker: Kate McRae, Regional Development Victoria

Topic: Understanding the functions of RDV and the key elements of effective economic development initiatives.

Speaker: Brett McClen, Brown Family Wine Group

Topic: Sustainable viticulture practices and the role of regional enterprise, including a bottling plant tour.

Drought, Disruption & The Drive to Adapt (Workshop)

Friday 4th April 2025
Supported by FRRR and the Wangaratta Turf Club
Wangaratta

Speaker: Maree Grenfell, Once Upon Tomorrow & The Resilience Canopy

Topic: Introducing the Resilience and Disruption Context

Speaker: Graeme Anderson, Agriculture Victoria

Topic: Climate Change and Drought Adaption

“The growth and
development of people
is the highest calling of
leadership.”

– Harvey S. Firestone

Melbourne Study Tour

Monday 5th & Tuesday 6th May 2025
Neighbourhood Justice Centre (NJC) &
Parliament House

Day 1

Speaker: **Mary Crooks**, Executive Director, Vic Women's Trust

Topic: Second order approaches to advocacy

Parliamentary Experience, Parliament House

Coordinated by Andres Lomp, Community Engagement Manager.

Speakers: **Wendy Lovell MP** and **Gaelle Broad MP**

Topic: Their roles, responsibilities, and experiences as regional Members for Northern Victoria

Day 2

Speaker: Rohan Leppert, Policy Advisor, MAV Municipal Association of Victoria

Topic: The role of LGAs and how to advocate locally

Speaker: **Katy McDevitt**, Leadership Victoria

Topic: Adaptive Leadership

Volunteerism

Thursday 22nd May 2025
Online

Speaker: Bhakti Dhamala

Topic: Volunteering as a pathway to opportunity for people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

Reflections from Adele Miles

Topic: Perspectives of young people on volunteering, including motivation, barriers, and generational change.



Seeing The Bigger Picture: Systems Thinking In Practice (Workshop)

Friday 30th May 2025
Supported by the Gardiner Foundation
Gundowring

Speaker: **Dr Gary Saliba**

Topic: Introduction to complex adaptive systems and the Cynefin framework, exploring how leaders interpret situations, make decisions, and respond to uncertainty in complex environments.

Speaker: **Fiona Elgin**, Interim Executive Officer, Dairy Australia – Murray

Topic: Leadership within the dairy sector, including capability, adaptation, and future opportunities.

Speaker: **Stuart Crosthwaite**, The Hermitage Dairy

Topic: Site tour and practical demonstration of systems thinking in action, highlighting innovation, sustainability, wellbeing, and forward-looking approaches to dairying.

Education

Friday 20th June
Mansfield

Speaker: **Judy Dixon**, Mansfield Autism Statewide Services

Topic: Therapeutic, farm-based learning – empowering autistic students and their families.

Speaker: **Sally Matheson**, Tomorrow Today

Topic: Long-term investment in early years education in Benalla.

Speaker: **Bonnie Clark**, Mansfield Adult Community Education

Topic: The role of adult education in strengthening community inclusion.

Speaker: **Mark Van Bergen**, CUC Ovens Murray

Topic: Local access to university study and what makes it work in practice.



Health & Wellbeing

Friday 4th July
Albury / Wodonga

Speaker: Trent Dean, Gateway Health

Topic: Leadership grounded in empathy and equity – meeting people where they are.

Speakers: Josie Maxwell and Harka Bista, Multicultural Community Farm

Topic: Connection, care, and belonging through shared spaces and culturally significant food.

Speakers: Alyce Fisher, Sergeant Michael Savage, and Sophie Enders (AVCLP Alumni)

Topic: Leading and contributing to community-centred projects – shaping ideas into impact.

Navigating Conflict

Thursday 17th July
Online

Facilitator: James Jensen

Topic: Practical strategies for approaching conflict with confidence and clarity, understanding the physiological process of conflict, and transforming moments of tension into opportunities for deeper trust and stronger outcomes.

Mid Point Reflection

Friday 1st August
Benalla

Speaker: Dr Helen Haines MP, Federal Member for Indi

Topic: Leadership journey, reflections on belonging, and responding to community.

Speaker: Bronwen O'Shea, Story Up

Topic: Communicating for impact – crafting compelling messages, delivering with confidence, and inspiring action.



Governance & Risk

Thursday 21st August
Online

Facilitator: Rob Carolane

Topic: Exploring governance structures and risk management in community and organisational contexts, with a focus on accountability, transparency, and the critical role of sound governance in sustaining leadership initiatives.

Community Led Action

Thursday 21st August
Corryong

Speaker: Dominic Sandilands FCHSM CHE GAICD, Upper Murray Inc

Topic: Community-led recovery and renewal

Speaker: Cathy Ross, Towong Bushfire Recovery Fund

Topic: The labyrinth project – a community-built space for reflection, supported by Border Trust.

Speaker: Andrew Whitehead, Mayor of Towong Shire Council

Topic: Strengthening opportunities and outcomes through genuine community consultation and collaboration.



Workforce & Housing

Friday 10th October Bright

Speaker: Celia Adams, CEO, Beyond Housing

Topic: Housing challenges across regional Victoria and the importance of stability in supporting participation and wellbeing.

Speaker: Steve Belli, Alpine Resilience Partnership

Topic: Recovery within an active scenario and the realities of community-led response and adaptation.

Speakers: Natalie Ajay (Alpine Resorts Victoria & Murray Regional Tourism) and Steve Belli (Alpine Entrepreneur)

Topic: Workforce opportunities and challenges in regional settings, including the intersection of tourism, local enterprise, and community development.

Speaker: Scott Brandon, Owner/Founder, Bright Brewery

Topic: Local entrepreneurship, business sustainability, and the role of regional enterprise in shaping vibrant communities.

Renewable Energy

Friday 24th October Yackandandah

Speaker: Tony Mahar, Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner

Topic: National perspectives on energy infrastructure, renewable transitions, and community engagement in large-scale energy projects.

Speaker: Matthew Charles-Jones

Topic: Local renewable energy initiatives, community-led action, and the pathway toward energy independence.

Facilitator: Susan Benedyka

Topic: Advocacy skills workshop – practical tools for influence, communication, and mobilising community voice.

Speaker: Mark McKenzie-McHarg, YCDCo

Topic: Community-driven enterprise, local investment, and the role of cooperative models in regional sustainability.



Closing Retreat

Friday 7th & Saturday 8th November Valley Homestead, Ovens

Participants gathered to conclude the program with a reflective two-day retreat that covered key aspects of their journey. This included presenting their project inquiries, clarifying their vision for community leadership, and reflecting on their development throughout the program. The final discussions provided a space for participants to consider their leadership paths beyond the program, assess their progress, and formally close out the experience.

Graduation / End of Year Celebration

Wednesday 12th November Supported by Wangaratta Turf Club

Graduation formed part of a broader, end-of-year celebration, serving as a platform to recognise and celebrate community efforts within the region. Guests enjoyed networking, and a keynote address by Mary Crooks AO. The 2025 cohort were presented with their certificates of graduation, with a signature address by Patron, John Brown AO.



2025

Annual Program Graduates



Jen Allan

Wangaratta

Indigo Shire Council – Historic Precinct & Visitor Experience Manager

Sponsor: Indigo Shire Council

I joined AVCLP to strengthen my leadership skills and broaden my network. At the time, I was focused on managing cultural heritage and tourism in a regional context and wanted to better advocate for community outcomes.

I've enjoyed the diversity of voices and stories across the program. Hearing from people leading in various sectors opened my eyes to the challenges and opportunities in our region. The relationships built with participants were a highlight, showing the power of collaboration.

Going forward, I want to apply my skills and confidence to strengthen the cultural and tourism sectors. I'm inspired to create partnerships that celebrate heritage, foster innovation, and build stronger visitor experiences. I'll also share insights with my team to achieve greater outcomes.

● **Enriching**

"From little things big things grow."
– Kev Carmody & Paul Kelly



Kara Chanter

Albury / Wodonga

Mercy Health – Palliative Care Nurse; Dying to Help – End of Life Doula, Loss and Grief Coach, Funeral Celebrant; End of Life Doula – Volunteer

Sponsor: June Canavan Foundation

I came into the program wanting to learn how to be a better leader. What I didn't expect was how much it would teach me about myself. It's made me more aware of my strengths and weaknesses, helped me slow down and listen, and reminded me it's okay to ask for help. It's shown me how to show up better for others by first showing up for myself.

What stands out most are the friendships and connections built through this program. Hearing from leaders of all kinds and listening to their stories helped me realise I can step into leadership too. Visiting the autism spectrum school was especially powerful, showing how leadership strengthens communities when we listen, learn, and support each other.

What I'll carry forward is the ability to slow down, listen, and not feel the need to fill every silence. I've realised that "no" is a complete sentence when it comes to self-care. These changes will shape how I show up—with more presence, clearer boundaries, and a stronger sense of purpose.

● **Empowering**

"Leadership is about empathy. It is about having the ability to relate to and connect with people for the purpose of inspiring and empowering their lives." – Oprah Winfrey



Bhakti Dhamala

Albury Wodonga

Women's Health Goulburn North East – Health Educator; Victorian Multicultural Commission – Committee Reference Member; Albury City Council – Multicultural Reference Group Member

Sponsor: AGL

Driven by a passion for grassroots community development, I joined the program to deepen my leadership skills and contribute to social change. I recognised the need for diverse women leaders and felt a responsibility to be part of that transformation. Leadership meant service, advocacy, and empowering others.

This journey affirmed that true community development begins with the community itself. Leadership must create space for people to thrive. Real change happens when we lead in partnership, recognising that we are all part of the solution.

Moving forward, I am committed to understanding community needs with curiosity and care—advocating for just, timely action. I now think at a systems level and will continue to build collective power, strengthen social infrastructure, and create safer, thriving communities.

● **Emergence**

"Leadership is not about speaking the loudest, but about creating space for every voice to be heard—and knowing when it's time to rise and lead the conversation."
– Bhakti Mainali



Tori Ferguson

Greta West

Rural City of Wangaratta – Media & Communications Coordinator

Sponsor: Rural City of Wangaratta

I heard about the program from community members and work colleagues whose perspectives I respect. I wasn't sure I identified with the title of leader but the journey felt intriguing and timely. I didn't have specific expectations, but I try to seize opportunities that challenge me. I hoped the program would help me understand what effective leadership looks like and equip me with skills I could bring to my work.

The program deepened my understanding of the complex challenges facing society, especially in rural communities. One insight that stayed with me was "no one authority will save us." Meeting the cohort was a privilege and gave me a renewed sense of pride and perspective. Mary Crooks' emphasis on respecting opposing views challenged me to be more open and grounded.

I now see leadership as something beyond formal titles. It's a level of caring and stewardship for a community, colleagues, or a place. This program helped me connect my community involvement and workplace commitment to a broader leadership identity. I'll carry forward confidence in showing up authentically, contributing purposefully, and encouraging others to lead.

🔗 Connection

"Maybe we can do powerful things from exactly where we are." – Dr. Katy McDevitt



Daniel Flack

Benalla

Telstra – Regional Engagement Manager, Northern Victoria; Benalla Angling Club – General Committee Member & Newsletter Editor; Waminda Community House – Digital Skills Mentor

Sponsor: Telstra

I was introduced to AVCLP through work, as we have sponsored the program for some time. I spoke with participants, alumni, and board members before applying. Everyone held the program in such high regard that I felt I had to give it a go.

The overwhelming stand-out for me was meeting other participants from across the region and sharing the experience. The "turning points" presentations accelerated our connections and highlighted the importance of self-awareness and empathy. I enjoyed program days at different organisations, where the passion of the people was incredibly engaging.

I'll carry forward deeper listening, stronger local connections, and a renewed commitment to inclusive representation and support for our region.

🔗 Grateful

"What's important now? – To evaluate the past, focus on the future, and tell you what you have to do in the present."



Owen Johnstone

Corryong

RJ & MJ Whitsed & Co – Manager, Organic Dairy Farm; Corryong Demons Football Netball Club – Committee Member/ Sponsorship Coordinator/Club Umpire

Sponsor: Border Trust

I was brought to the program by recommendation of friends. After a 7-year stint as club president, I was keen to dip my toe into personal development. I hoped to gain tools and ideas on becoming a great community leader.

The biggest takeaway from the program is the cohort itself. The knowledge and friendship within the group is more than I expected. I've found myself calmer and more level-headed when dealing with conflict, and the speakers have been incredibly helpful.

I want to continue to grow as a calm, approachable person in my community. If I can help others while keeping boundaries and enjoying life, that is enough to call this program a success.

🔗 Life-changing

"The five people you hang around most is who you will become."



Lisa Logan

Falls Creek

Falls Creek Central Reservations – Reservations & Marketing Officer; Falls Creek Historical Society – Secretary

Sponsor: North East Catchment Management Authority

Despite years of curiosity about AVCLP I never saw myself as a leader, nor had the time as a business owner and volunteer. Disasters from 2019 to 2023 meant I had to step up to advocate for my community. Once there was time to reflect, it felt right to undertake the program.

Each program day inspired me. Guest speakers' contributions and insights were invaluable. I felt honoured to participate and hopeful I can give back as much as I've received. Sharing the journey with the 2025 cohort was incredible—each person an inspiration and reminder that challenges are where we grow and learn.

Leadership often comes through evolution and circumstances. I wanted to be there for my community in the past; now I feel more supportive and skilled to help our region grow and be more resilient.

● Galvanising

“Real leadership is leaders recognising that they serve the people they lead.”

– Pete Hoekstra



Andrew Manning

Wangaratta

Rural City of Wangaratta – Assets and Development Coordinator

Sponsor: Rural City of Wangaratta

When the opportunity presented itself to develop my leadership skills, it matched my ambitions. I wanted to learn how to improve my leadership style and communication. My engineering skills gave me technical knowledge, but I knew I needed to grow to be a better leader.

At every community day we were introduced to leaders or presenting turning points. I needed to hear that everyone has their own issues and perspectives. As a result, I feel my own issues aren't as challenging, and my perspective has greater value. Being more open enables growth and leadership.

At the beginning of the year, I was waiting for others to pick up the pieces around issues like climate change's impact on infrastructure. By mid-course, I realised I could influence local government decisions. I started suggesting improvements and hope to continue being a proactive leader.

● Inspirational

“Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.”



Ebony Mull

Gundowring

Self-employed Dairy Farmer; Non-practising Veterinarian; Alpine Valleys Dairy Inc – President

Sponsor: Gardiner Foundation

I applied for the leadership program after encouragement from Alumni in the dairy industry, aiming to strengthen my leadership as president of Alpine Valleys Dairy Inc. I wanted to grow in governance, conflict resolution, and connection-building while improving self-awareness. The opening retreat left me confident in the group's authenticity and willingness to learn.

This program deepened my appreciation for diverse leadership styles and the value of authentic, passionate leadership. I learned that strong communities thrive on diversity and collaboration. Most inspiring was realising that even large organisations begin with small, purposeful steps—reminding me that meaningful change starts locally.

I now see leadership as a balance of passion, resilience, and self-care. The biggest shift for me was recognising that leaders are everyday people who choose to step up. I've learned the importance of not overextending myself and encouraging others to share the load.

● Enlightening

“People don't care how much you know, they only want to know how much you care.”



Allison O'Keefe

Mansfield

Mansfield Shire Council – Coordinator, Community Strengthening Team; Friends of Mansfield Library – Group member

Sponsor: Mansfield Shire Council

I was drawn to the program due to its community leadership focus and the North East Victoria context for practical learning, including the locations chosen for program days.

The speakers, fellow program members and alumni have shown there are many ways to be a community leader and that everyone's journey is valid. My view of what leadership is has changed. The turning point presentations were a highlight and gave me confidence to guide my own leadership path.

I plan to continue developing my community leadership skills and feel more confident in becoming the leader I would like to be. I'll keep trying to show up as the leader I want to see.

🔗 Insightful



Gemma Robinson

Beechworth

GOTAFE – Team Leader, Business and Education Support

Sponsor: GOTAFE

I saw the program as an opportunity to get to know the region better and understand the North East, an area I recently moved back to and the community GOTAFE services.

The 2025 participant group and the connections we've made have been as valuable as the knowledge and understanding of the communities and concepts we explored throughout the program.

The program highlighted the strength in diversity and community. I have a better appreciation for the contributions anyone can make and feel more equipped to take on projects with varied stakeholders.

🔗 Connection

"Start where you are, use what you know, do what you can." – Arthur Ashe



Craig Ross

Corryong

Self-employed – Business Owner; Corryong Memorial and RSL Halls – Committee Member & Event Organiser; Corryong Chamber of Commerce – Member

Sponsor: Border Trust

After completing AVCL's Upper Murray program, I was inspired and keen to do more for my community. I wanted to see Corryong grow and thrive. I was contributing locally through my business, employing youth, and sponsoring clubs, but not really active in making change. Joining the Memorial Hall committee allowed me to help organise local events, and I wanted to expand my external network to benefit the community.

What has stood out most is that you can never stop learning, growing, and absorbing information. Every speaker, location, story, and turning point planted a different seed of understanding and new thought processes. Sharing this learning built stronger bonds with like-minded people and strengthened my belief in my ability to make change.

Moving forward, I want to share everything I've learnt and listen deeply to others. Combining knowledge can only expand our possibilities. I want to work collaboratively to create an inviting, inclusive, and understanding community.

🔗 Possibilities

"Be teachable... you're not always right."



Georgia Saunders

King Valley

Outdoor School – 15 Mile Creek – Teacher; Sustainable King Valley – Committee support (Food Hub ops, events, education, social media); King Valley Arts – Committee support (events, education, social media)

Sponsor: Rural City of Wangaratta Community Grants Scholarship

I joined after encouragement from inspiring locals. As an outdoor educator, I wanted to explore how to sustain motivation and resilience in teams while strengthening my own leadership. Being new to King Valley, I hoped to connect more deeply. The program reshaped how I view leadership and community—not separate groups, but a connected whole working together.

The program helped me understand my leadership style and how it works alongside others. My communication has grown. Learning to step back, share responsibility, and ask for help was a big shift. Leadership thrives when everyone's strengths are valued. I'm excited to bring these lessons into my community roles.

I'll carry forward more balance, collaboration, and confidence. I aim to contribute to community initiatives with a focus on teamwork and sustainability—creating space for others to grow and share ideas. I'll keep fostering young leaders and strengthening connections across King Valley.

● **Transformative**

"Individually, we are one drop. Together, we are an ocean." – Ryunosuke Satoro



Kirsten Seeto

Wandiligong

Women's Health Goulburn North East – Operations Manager; Beyond Housing – Board Director

Sponsor: Alpine Shire Council Community Recovery Scholarship

Having moved to the region 8 years ago, I was finding it difficult to make the professional connections I needed to contribute. I enjoyed working locally but wanted to understand the region better and find where I could make an impact. I was looking to expand my network and understand the region.

The people I have met on this journey have been unexpected gold. From my cohort to incredible community contributors, it has been a privilege to meet them all. Highlights included meeting Mary Crooks from the Victorian Women's Trust and hearing Gary Saliba speak about Systems Thinking.

I realise that what I have to offer is as important as how I offer it. My work is about meeting people and organisations where they are, appreciating what has been done, and collaborating on gaps I can help fill. I'm excited to carry forward the momentum this course has started.

● **Connection**

"Anchor change in honouring contribution."
– Helen Haines



Laura Thompson

Eskdale

Self-employed – Dairy Farmer; Alpine Valleys Dairy Inc – Dare to Dairy Dinner Subcommittee Lead; Mitta United Football & Netball Club – Development Squad Coach

Sponsor: Gardiner Foundation

Before joining the AVCLP, I was encouraged to apply by several alumni. They all spoke highly of the program and its value, which gave me the initial confidence to apply. While I was genuinely excited to be selected, I'll admit I wasn't entirely sure what the program entailed - or if I 'fit the brief.'

I knew I was contributing to my community but often with limiting beliefs 'just a dairy farmer, just a mum.' Through this experience, I now see the real value in what I bring: as a woman, a mother, a coach, a community member, and as someone with lived experience through multiple different sports and community NFP organisations.

The program taught me leadership isn't about hierarchy, it's about how we show up and take everyone with us. Leading with heart means showing up authentically, making intentional contributions, and creating space for all to thrive. I've learned the power of saying no to focus on what matters most.

● **Inspiring**

"I'm still learning."



Haley Tudor-Harrop

Mansfield

Proactive Tax & Business Services – Accountant; Goulburn Valley Water – Non Executive Director; Mansfield & District Community Enterprises Ltd – Vice Chair & Chair Community Impact Team; Mansfield & District Basketball Association – Secretary & Operations
Sponsor: Mansfield & District Community Bank

I had watched the program from the sidelines as a sponsor for many years, and although life with young children hadn't allowed the time to commit, 2025 seemed like a good year. I was hoping to develop a network in the NE, learn my leadership style, and how to lead others. I wanted to expand my practical experience and understand the theory and tools behind good community leadership.

The people will always stand out for me. I've found 16 new friends and colleagues who will support and champion one another. Hearing from experienced leaders and learning from their challenges was invaluable. The program emphasised resilience and strength, and sharing stories deepened relationships and respect.

I will reflect on personality types often and work with different styles to achieve more diverse outcomes. I've already applied what I learned about government engagement, particularly in preparing for conversations with politicians.

🌟 Surprising

"A great leader embraces failure, allows their people to learn from their failures, encourages lifelong learning and inspires them to come together and achieve greatness."



Lisa Vlacci

West Wodonga

CFA

Sponsor: CFA

I had been researching AVCL programs for some time, and when applications opened for the AVCLP, I was very excited when I noticed that CFA was a sponsor! I went into this program with an open mind and a yearning to take in as much as I possibly can so I can help others to be better leaders in all aspects of my life.

I feel I am growing not just as a leader but personally. Learning about the different forms of leadership in a community capacity has been enjoyable as I didn't really know about many of these roles, and it is helping to understand how I can build networks and connect with different industries if ever needed.

The program has had a positive impact on how I see myself and the valued contributions I can make. I feel more confident in my abilities and that others see those abilities in me. The "imposter syndrome" is slowly wearing down. Moving forward I want to keep building that confidence so I can give back to the community and inspire others to take those steps and lead themselves.

🌟 Empowering

"A leader is one who knows the way, goes the way, and shows the way."

"The world is changed by your example, not by your opinion."

– Paulo Coelho

Community Inquiries

A core part of the Annual Program is a group learning experience designed to help participants think deeply about their role in creating change and to practice working collaboratively in a group.

This has long been a key element of the program's approach to leadership development, providing valuable opportunities to apply learning in real-world contexts. We have continued to adapt the structure and format of this component in line with the program's evolving focus and participant needs. In previous years, this has taken the form of community projects or fundraising activities, while this year participants undertook a new approach.

Community Inquiries explored local challenges and opportunities as a way for participants to deepen their understanding of leadership in context. Working in small teams formed at the Opening Retreat, they identified a question or theme of shared interest connected to the future of their communities and designed an inquiry to guide their learning. Each team approached this work differently, with actions including stakeholder engagement, research, and the development of insights through conversations and site visits.

The inquiries culminated in a series of presentations that shared what participants learned about the dynamics shaping their chosen issue, the leadership required to respond, and potential pathways for action. This process provided a practical and collaborative group learning experience that built skills in inquiry design, systems thinking, stakeholder engagement, and translating insight into impact.



Network It

Team members: Jen Allan, Georgia Saunders, Bhakti Dhamala, Ebony Mull, Tori Ferguson, Laura Thompson

The Network It team began with a shared interest in the question, "What brings people together?" Early conversations centred on ideas like food, music, and shared positive experiences as potential ways to bridge divides within communities. This led to an initial plan to deliver a large-scale community event aimed at fostering connection.

However, as the group delved deeper, they realised that they had moved too quickly towards solutions without fully understanding the underlying issues. This reflection marked a pivotal shift in their project. Drawing inspiration from grassroots approaches discussed by Mary Crooks and through a site visit to the Bhutanese Community Garden in Wodonga, the team shifted focus from delivering an event to exploring the root causes of disconnection.

They designed a series of community conversations, drawing on the Kitchen Table Conversation model, to uncover the drivers of connection and disconnection in their own communities.

These conversations prioritised listening and trust-building over formal data collection, emphasising the value of dialogue as both a tool for understanding and a catalyst for change.

Through this process, the team gained deeper insight into the complexities of community engagement and the leadership qualities required to create meaningful change. They reflected on the importance of listening before acting, supporting others to take the lead, and embracing patience, adaptability, and trust in the process.

Ultimately, their greatest achievement was the growth of their capacity as reflective, community-minded leaders.

Seedlings

Team members: Lisa Logan, Gemma Robinson, Kara Chanter, Allison O'Keefe

The Seedlings team set out to explore how emerging community ideas can be better supported in their earliest stages — before they become fully developed projects. Their initial concept was to create an open-source hub of templates, tools, and guidance to help community groups shape their ideas, define objectives, and increase their ability to access funding and support. The team recognised that many worthwhile initiatives struggle not because of a lack of passion or purpose, but because groups leap to solutions without first establishing clarity and structure.

Their inquiry examined the barriers that novice community groups face when moving an idea from concept to action. Drawing on personal experience, they identified common patterns such as unclear goals, inconsistent communication, and volunteer fatigue. They explored examples from Tasmania, Scotland, and the UK, learning how projects grounded in genuine community ownership and well-facilitated dialogue are more likely to succeed. These insights reinforced the need for accessible tools that help groups articulate their purpose and direction before implementation.

As their inquiry progressed, the team realised that they were experiencing the very challenges they sought to address. The absence of a clear outcome made it difficult to sustain focus, revealing how time, energy, and differing capacities shape collaboration. Rather than producing a tangible product, their most valuable outcome was a deeper understanding of process — how ideas evolve, stall, or shift when clarity and leadership are uncertain.

Through honest reflection, the team came to see that effective leadership also involves recognising limits, being realistic about capacity, and knowing when to pause. They gained new awareness of their working styles, how to maintain engagement, and how to create conditions for collective progress. The Seedlings inquiry ultimately demonstrated that leadership begins not with having the right answers, but with creating space for clarity, curiosity, and shared understanding.



Keep It Fun

Team members: Haley Tudor-Harrop, Kirsten Seeto, Owen Johnston, Craig Ross, Daniel Flack, Andrew Manning, Lisa Vlacci

The Keep It Fun team explored how community engagement can underpin the success of major projects — in this case, the development of a mountain bike park as a catalyst for social and economic renewal in rural towns. Initially, the team set out to produce technical documentation on how to establish such a facility. However, after discovering that this work already existed, they shifted their focus to what was missing: a clear and practical framework for engaging the community throughout the project's lifecycle.

The team investigated the many forms community engagement can take and learned that effective strategies are never one-size-fits-all. They spoke with leaders in the mountain biking industry and consulted those who had faced both successes and challenges in developing similar projects. Key lessons included the importance of early involvement of local government, collaboration

with Traditional Owners, and demonstrating how a project can deliver broader community benefits beyond recreation — such as training opportunities, increased tourism, and business growth.

The result was a comprehensive Community Engagement Plan outlining strategies for engagement across every stage of a project, from initial consultation and planning to ongoing operation and even potential closure. The plan is designed to be practical, adaptable, and widely applicable beyond mountain biking — relevant to any community asset that requires strong local buy-in.

For the team, the inquiry provided rich opportunities for growth and self-awareness. They learned to trust the process, adapt to changing priorities, and work collaboratively with people of diverse skills and perspectives. Their reflections highlighted the importance of understanding team dynamics, setting boundaries, and being patient with non-linear progress — all essential capabilities for leadership in complex community settings.



For the team, the inquiry provided rich opportunities for growth and self-awareness. They learned to trust the process, adapt to changing priorities, and work collaboratively with people of diverse skills and perspectives.

Alumni Engagement

The Alumni Action Group, made up of representatives from both the Board and the Alumni body, guides the development and delivery of an annual Alumni Engagement Plan. This work seeks to strengthen relationships, enable collaboration, support skill development, and create avenues for our Alumni to contribute within their communities.

A more integrated approach was taken this year, with several initiatives designed to involve both Alumni and current program participants. Deliverables included two in-person workshops, three online skills sessions, a panel contribution, and two networking events, as well as input toward the Resilience Canopy pathway to practice partnership.

We thank the members of the Action Group for their work: Anthony Griffiths, Bev Hoffman (departed), Elise Hill, Sophie Enders (Chair), Tegan Allen, and Lisa Turner.

Navigating Conflict (Online Workshop)

Delivered during June, this session was facilitated by James Jensen, and focused on practical strategies for approaching conflict with confidence and clarity. Alumni and AVCLP participants explored the physiological process of conflict, and how constructive dialogue and thoughtful leadership can turn moments of tension into opportunities for deeper trust and stronger outcomes.

Place Based Capital (Online Workshop)

In July, an online panel brought together voices from across regional Australia to explore how communities are using place-based capital to take charge of change. Meaghan Burkett (Ethical Fields), Mary-Anne Scully (ACRE – Australian Centre for Rural Entrepreneurship), Ian Fitzpatrick (YCDCo), and Rose West (Housing Matters Action Group, Bellingen) shared insights from their work on the ground, highlighting the role of local assets and relationships in shaping community futures.





Seeing The Bigger Picture: Systems Thinking In Practice

In May, Alumni and AVCLP participants came together in Gundowring for a deep exploration of systems thinking, leadership, and the regional dairy industry, supported by the Gardiner Foundation. The day invited attendees to step back and consider how leaders operate within complex, interconnected environments, and how understanding systems can shape the way we respond to change.

Dr Gary Saliba introduced concepts of complex adaptive systems and the Cynefin framework, unpacking the difference between complicated and complex domains. Attendees examined how their maps of reality influence the way they interpret situations, make decisions, and respond to uncertainty.

Fiona Elgin, Interim Executive Officer of Dairy Australia – Murray, provided valuable insight into leadership within the dairy sector, sparking conversations about capability, adaptation, and future opportunities in the industry.

The afternoon encompassed a site tour of The Hermitage Dairy with Stuart Crosthwaite, whose generosity in sharing knowledge and experience left a lasting impression. Seeing concepts come to life on the ground – through innovation, sustainability, well-being, and a forward-looking approach to dairying – was a standout highlight of the day and a powerful demonstration of the mindset needed to navigate complexity.

Governance & Risk (Online Workshop)

Led by Rob Carolane, this session was delivered during August, and provided a grounded look at governance structures and the realities of managing risk in community and organisational life. Through examples and discussion, Alumni and AVCLP participants built an understanding of accountability, transparency, and the importance of sound governance in sustaining leadership efforts.

Pathway to Practice Pilot Program – Resilience Canopy

We were pleased to formalise a partnership with The Resilience Canopy, launching the Pathway to Practice pilot to connect our Alumni with opportunities to deepen their practice and apply their leadership skills in real-world contexts. Through the partnership, Alumni are able to take up fully supported placements in the Resilience Canopy Practitioner Program, contributing to community-led initiatives and strengthening local capacity.

The Resilience Canopy is a national initiative that supports communities to lead their own journey – building strength, connection, and readiness for the challenges they face. Its approach is self-determined and locally led, backed by the tools, relationships, and partnerships needed to translate ideas into action.

Building on this foundation, we will support a practitioner program delivery in North East Victoria in 2026, expanding access for local leaders to participate.

Through the partnership, Alumni are able to take up fully supported placements in the Resilience Canopy Practitioner Program, contributing to community-led initiatives and strengthening local capacity.

Honorary Graduates and Special Awards

SPECIAL AWARD RECIPIENTS:

Anthony Griffiths (2024)

Anthony received the inaugural special award, in recognition of outstanding achievements by existing graduates. Anthony served on the AVCL Board for 12 consecutive years, with his leadership being instrumental in driving significant change and positive outcomes.

HONORARY GRADUATES:

Katie Warner (2024)

Katie served on the AVCL Board from 2020 to 2023, providing financial expertise during the transition to a new company structure beyond the conclusion of her term.

Linda Griffiths-Brown (2023)

Linda served on the AVCL Board from 2016 to 2022, and contributed to many of AVCL's strategic initiatives, including moving the organisation towards financial sustainability.

Robyn Farley (2022)

As a member of the Strategy & Stakeholder Subcommittee and the AVCL Board during 2016-2021, Robyn contributed significantly through strategic and business planning and also served as a guest speaker.

Clare Kiely (2022)

Clare served on the AVCL Board from 2015-2020, including two years as Chair. She generously shared her expertise in strategy and stakeholder management and was a strong advocate for AVCL within DELWP and other portfolio partners.

Susan Benedyka (2019)

A long-time supporter, Susan played an instrumental role in the Opening, Mid-Year, and Final Retreats and was also an active member of the AVCL Board.

Barry Sullivan (2017)

Barry was a Board member from 1999-2007. His presentations on leadership in business have left a positive, lasting impression on our participants.

Graham Nickless (2016)

Widely regarded as the catalyst for the creation of the AVCLP, Graham's vision, strategic thinking, love of the region, and persistent advocacy were crucial in its development.

Anne Shaw (2016)

As the AVCLP's Executive Officer from 2001-2008, Anne is recognized as an integral part of AVCLP's long-term success.

Martin Carlson OAM (2015)

A long-time supporter and sponsor of Community Leadership Programs across Victoria, including AVCLP.

Nerida Ker (2014)

A founding Board member who played a key role in developing the organisation's governance and securing ongoing funding.

Neil Clydsdale (2014)

A graduate of the first AVCLP Program and long-serving Board member, Neil has been a passionate advocate in the Upper Murray.

Bernard Young (2013)

Bernard was instrumental in successfully gaining funding and support for the Program during its early years.

David Roff (2012)

A Board member from 2003-2010 and Chair from 2006-2010, David significantly increased the Program's profile and sustainability.

Judy's service exemplified clarity, balance, and commitment to community

Each recipient has:

- ≡ **Significantly advanced the development of community leadership within the region**
- ≡ **Made significant contributions to the community through demonstration of exceptional leadership**
- ≡ **Contributed outstanding service to the Alpine Valleys Community Leadership Program**



2025 Honorary Graduate:

Judy Charlton

Judy Charlton served on the Board of Alpine Valleys Community Leadership from October 2020 to October 2024, including as Chair during a particularly challenging period for the organisation.

While stability and oversight are core expectations of any Chair, Judy's leadership went well beyond this. She provided exceptional guidance through a time of change and uncertainty, ensuring the organisation remained steady and able to continue its work of developing community leadership across the region.

A key contribution of Judy's time was her skill in guiding and supporting a new Executive Officer, striking the balance between governance oversight and personal mentorship.

Judy contributed to the upgrade to many procedural and governance aspects of the organisational and board function. She also played a pivotal role in establishing AVCL's DGR-1 Fund entity, a milestone achievement that now secures greater opportunities for community investment and scholarships into the future.

Judy's service exemplified clarity, balance, and deep commitment to community, leaving a legacy of strengthened governance, financial diversification, and sustained impact.

AVCLP Alumni

First delivered during 1998-1999, the program has since been consistently delivered annually, creating a strong network of Alumni contributing to their communities across North East Victoria, Border regions and beyond. The program now has over 500 graduates.

1999	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Lachlan Campbell	David Bell	Mandy Allen	Annesska Brown	Helen Al Helwani	Neil Aird
Neil Clydsdale	Jenny Bradley	Owen Bassett	Wayne Donehue	Janet Bell	John Antonello
Jenny Evans	Jill Breadon	James Burgess	Tracey Farrant	Andrew Briggs	Tammy Atkins
Nola Evans	John Bridges	David Briggs	Phillip Gardner	Erin Brooks	Allan Findlay
Mark Felton	Rob Carolane	Debbie Corbett	Phil Garoni	Trish Curtis	Will Flamsteed
Simon Glass	Lyn Coulston	Yvonne Evans	Roger Gregory	Graham Daghish	Lynn Gibson
Irene Grant	Faith Damm	Karen Hayes	Andrew Holm	Lauren Fearne	Paul Greaves
Roger Haddrell	Marian Dowling	Karen Jones	Gavin Kelly	Kevin Freeman	Anthony Griffiths
Tracey Hooper	Bruce Dwerryhouse	Kristy McCormick	David Kidd	Kate Green	Kris Harrison
Don Jackson	Rick Felton	Marilyn McKenzie-	Carol Hill	Christine Jewell	Chris Hepner
Jocelyn Lyon	Helen Haines	McHarg	Michele Lee	Sue Leavold	Kaye Hildebrand
Mick McInerney	Bev Hoffmann	Leesa Milne	Barry McIntosh	Sonia Lewis	Nell Kell
Dianne Mangan	Phil Howard	Kevin Murphy	Henry McKenzie	Sue McCabe	Catherine Kent
Philippa Noble	Heather Ingpen	Betty Murtagh	Colleen O'Brien	Gabriele Moritz	Jan Kowarzik
Marion Rak	Veronica Lanigan	David Ryan	Tracy Pirie	Gary Nicholls	David Larkman
Michael Resson	Shaun Lawlor	Graham Scott	Deb Randich	Katie Park	Renee Palmer
Grant Scale	Denis Martin	MariJana Southern	Pamela Simpson	Doug Paton	Elaine Paton
Jon Temby	Steve Morell	John Stapleton	Chloe Southern	Hugh Paton	Mary Prowse
Maureen Titcumb	Lucy Pizzini	Tanya Tatalaschwili	Michelle Wilkinson	Sue Salau	Judy Seymour
Shane Wright	Graeme Pollard	Geoff Turnbull	Robert Williams	Peter Scales	Caitlin Sheehan
	Jo Saggars			Ralph Scalzo	Aaron Vanegmond
	Rob Steel			Paul Sladdin	Debbie Watts
	Rainier Van Dyk			Julie Wilkins	
2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Helen Allan	Roy Baird	Sue Arndt	Mary Anderson	Luke Brock	Jacqui Bright
Tracey Appleby	Robert Bon	Gillian Belle	Jenny Ashby	Leanne Bussell	AnnMaree Christian
Susan Bull	Felicity Brooke	Sandy Belgre	Graeme Blake	Ashley Campbell	Tracey Cooper
Paul Brady	Tim Clune	Brett Bevan	Gwenda Canty	-Brown	Garry Corcoran
Jeff Carboon	Kerry Craig	Malcolm Bradbury	Matthew Charles -	Kevin Cosgriff	Sandra Dalton
Angela Craven	Shane Downie	Julia Cocks	Jones	Karen Daghish	Kevin de Henin
Sarah Daniell	Sarah Flamsteed	Kym Goodman	Anthony Cole	Pat Doyle	Deb Donkers
Trish Gallagher	David Guy	Catherine Hattersley	Ross Grant	Adele Earl	Julie Folan
Leanne Harris	Gwen Holford	Phil Horner	Alice Gratton	Racheal Edis	Judy Griffiths
Anne Hiskins	Carolyn Humby	Paul Horton	Cherie Gottschling	Emma Avery	Bridie Guy
Lynne Jones	Melissa Ivone	Gayle Hughes	Tegan Lithgow	Cheryl Impink	Lauren Landman
Jacinta Ludeman	Barbara Martin	Brian Jones	Helen Langborne	Andrew	Narelle Martin
Sue Lukins	Lisa McInerney	Grant Jones	Lauren McCully	McGranahan	Sara Reid
Jackie Mooney	Kerry Moylan	Justin King	Emma McPherson	Kate Marshall	Sandra Ross
Anthony Nicholson	Cristina Perra	Lisa Mangelsdorf	Shane Martin	Leon Newton	Grant Saunders
Michele Padbury	Alison Pockley	Chris Morris	Diane Martin	Austin Nicholas	Kate Simpson
Tony Rebetzke	Greta Quinlivan	Kelvin Neal	Wendy Porter	Sally Rodgers	Bart Smith
Leonard Redfern	Vicki Robinson	Matthew O'Connell	Judith Samways	Birgit Schonafinger	Cheryl Smith
Helen Robinson	Lizette Salmon	Colleen Reynolds	Charmaine Stefani	Faye Smart	Michael Vanderzee
Shay Simpson	Kim Scanlon	Wayne Rotherham	Craig Turton	Melanie Walker	Karen van de Sande
Travis Smith	Celia Turnbull	Joanne Ryan	Helen Vey		Maree Warnett
		Christopher Tate			Bindy Welsh
		Kristy Youman			Bronwen Wilson
					David Roff (Hon)

2013

Tessa Archbold
Charlotte Bissett
Deanne Campbell-Brown
Suz Christison
Lyn Clark
Chris Cumming
Michael Donehue
Stephen Gemmill
Craig Grant
Angela Harders
Joanne Hughes
Cate Kirk
Kitty Knappstein
Lisa Linton
Michael Nardella
Kevin Newton
Mayssa Powell
Bruce Ray
Peter Sacco
Jenny Sinnott
Jennie Star
Vanessa Stitz
Jackie Thompson
Geraldine Torpy
Bernard Young (Hon)

2014

Elisha Barry
Paul Blackshaw
Steven Burke
Lisa Cartledge
John Cavedon
Elizabeth Frazer
Jemma Galvin
Sally Hayden
Michelle Hudson
Jeanie Keeton
Richard Merton
Trish Mom
Martina Moore
Kerrie Mountford
Craig Murphy
Kyle Oxley
Will Read
Tania Weller
Anthony Wilson
Brendan White
Gary Wingrave
Elise Wood
Nerida Kerr (Hon)
Neil Clydsdale (Hon)

2015

Deanne Burge
Michelle Burrowes
Jane Carney
Bronwyn Chapman
Matthew Currie
Vidura Delpitiya
Mark Ditcham
Elizabeth Ellis
Dianne Ferguson
Tahni Froudust
Jenny Griffiths
Sue Harris
Allan Hooper
Nicholas Jordan
Owen Lappin
Kirsten Lingard
Steven Martin
Bonnie Mcintosh
Kerryn Mitchell
Courtney Naughton
Lucy O'Dwyer
Kevin Powell
Rigtje Raadsveld
Martin Carlson OAM (Hon)

2016

Margaret Anderson
Lisa Basler
Catriona Brown
Nicola Burns
Simon Crase
Michelle Critchley
Ange Davidson
Kellie Davies
Emma Ghys
Victoria Griffiths
Lauralee Hogg
Renae Johns
Ben Kneebone
Rosie Koop
Renee Leary
Erin O'connor
Jason Perna
Carolyn Sammon
Victoria Schmidt
Allan Thrum
Courtney Ward - Jackson
Andrew Whitehead
Fiona Wigg
Graham Nickless (Hon)
Anne Shaw (Hon)

2017

Luke Chilcott
Helen Clark
Catherine Wanjiru
Clarke
Sandra Duffy
Karen Gunner
Benjamin Hawkins
Will Jermey
Alison Lloyd
Troy Mahoney
Katie Moore
Nicole Murphy
Richard Paschke
Chris Rodgers
Tammy Smith
Jacqueline Smith
Nicole Stephens
Kimberly Taylor
Ryan Thomas
Shane Tucker
Amy Van De Ven
Tamara Watson
Barry Sullivan (Hon)

2018

Cassandra Campbell
Judith Ahmat
Natalie Ajay
Aida Baharestani
Tanille Bailey
Maria Berry
John Chanter
Alice Colclough
Lisa Dekeling
Libby Dowling
Sven Erikson
Julia Fitz-Gerald
Ashley Fitzpatrick
Jane Gehrig
Kelly Harwood
Heidi Hodge
Dave Jenson
Kerry Lee
Kym Loechel
Swathi Mahendran
Celia Piesse
Dan Purcell
Emma Williamson
Nicola Winter
Kim Woosnam
Susan Benedyka (Hon)

2019

Leon Carter
Cassandra Campbell
Mal Clarke
Shane Crispin
Rebecca Damm
Simon Eakin
Sophie Enders
Jodi Finlayson
Lesley Forman
Kerri Imlach
Rupinder Kaur
Jesse King
Emma Knights
Liam McMahan
Jessica Oldmeadow
Rachael Richards
Rebecca Sacco
Hayden Sharp
Justine Shelton
Francine Stacey
Sue Thornton
Patricia Van De Paverd
Lucie Wallis
Trish Winzer

2020

Glenn Allan
Murray Bennett
Elita Briggs
Jackie Broughton
Thomas Carberry
Anita Chennell
Valissa Clarke
Trish Crockett
Jane Diplock
Alyce Fisher
Julie Hancock
Monique Hillenaar
Dave Hume
Jill James
Diarmuid Kelly
Mir McGowan
Bobbi McKibbin
Glenn Mercer
Brett Mugridge
Jack Nelson
Amy Northwood
Bronwyn Parker
Laura Sutherland
Craig Thorp
Shane Tomkins
Suzanne Vilé
Tim Wallis
Rachel Wolfe

2021

Justin Armstrong
Tamara Barton
Laura Benson
Pahal Man Bhattarai
Anthony Cheesman
Peter Christison
Bonnie Clark
Natalie Flay
Hayley Hollis
Sally Hughes
Andrew Jones
Pia Kennedy
Peter Kenyon
Lee Manning
Olivia Noto
Melinda Pentreath
Edith Peters
Helen Sellar
Tegan Sharwood
Jennifer Sleep
Julia Vesval
Maria Wadley
Gemma Whitehead
Allison Winters

2022

Tegan Allen
Kristin Beggs
Steve Belli
Kate Clark
Nathan Fenton
Rho Fry
Brendan Grigg
Kerissa Heritage
Elise Hill
Rachel Hogan
Tanya Howard
Megan Hunt
Maisie Pilli
Cazz Redding
Maureen Rogers
Kellie
Sutherland
Joanne Turner
Aaron Wallace
Jane Witherow
Nicholas Wright
Robyn Farley (Hon)
Clare Kiely (Hon)

2023

Amanda Hore
Domenica Hunkin
Gianna Verdini-Fensom
Irene Day
Jenny Corser
Kane Fitzpatrick
Kate Walsh
Katrina Pawley
Kirsty Branagan
Lauren Kelly
Lisa Turner
Maria Kraus
Matthew Hicks
Michael Savage
Paige Zamperoni
Romina McEwan
Rosie Suter
Sarah Glass
Sarimah Hellyer
Sean Barrett
Skye Rhodes-Mitchell
Linda Griffiths-Brown (Hon)

2024

Tasman Clingan
Amy Daeché
Olga Davis
Sally Day
Blake Edwards
Cassandra Elliott
Amanda Giason
Ilona Goswell
Alison Kirkwood
Zoe Konkoly
Rachael Mackay
Joanne Nicholson
Rachel Paton
Vaun Shearer
Joanne Tanner
Werner Vogels
Melanie Von Blanckensee
Daniel Warner
Narelle Watters
Katie Warner (Hon)

Looking ahead to 2026

We look toward 2026 with a clear focus on strengthening leadership capacity across our regions while continuing to respond to changing community needs. Our flagship Annual Program remains the cornerstone of this work, equipping people with the confidence, networks, and knowledge to influence outcomes that matter locally.

While funding has concluded through the Stronger Country Communities Fund that enabled the Fischer Community Leadership Program, a new partnership with Border Trust and the Sunshine Foundation will see this work continue for a further three years. With a key focus on underserved regional communities in Southern NSW, the program will build on its legacy and ensure that more people can step forward to lead and contribute where they live.

The three-year grant that enabled the Upper Murray Community Leadership Program has also concluded; however, delivery will continue in 2026 through support from Upper Murray Inc and DEECA. This investment reflects the importance of leadership to the region's future and directly supports the aspirations of the Upper Murray 2030 Vision.

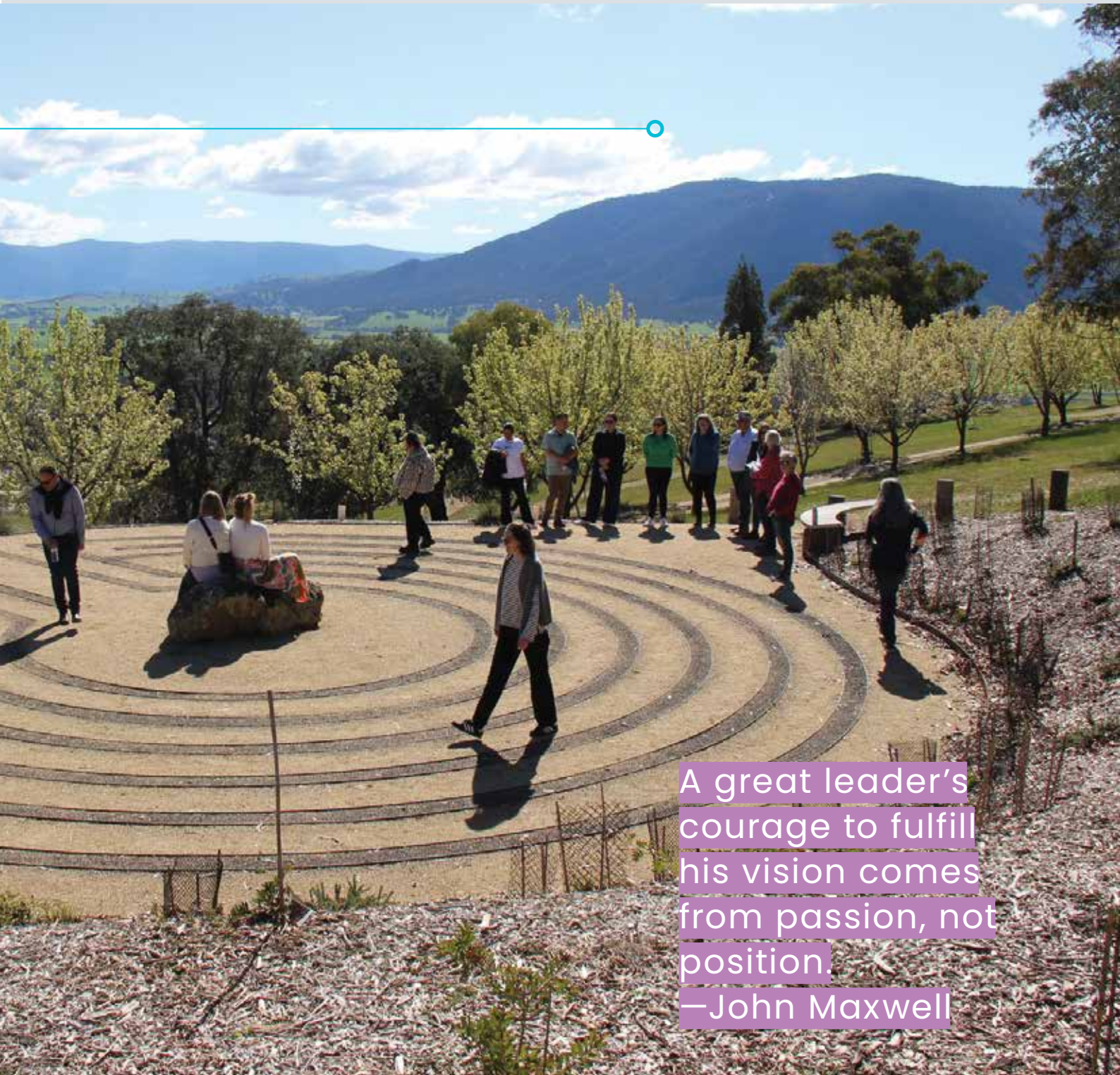
Beginning in late February, a new program shaped by the Ovens Murray Regional Drought Resilience Plan will commence, supported by the North East Catchment Management Authority (NECMA) through the Future Drought Fund.

The initiative recognises that preparing for drought is a systems challenge, shaped by the relationships between people, place, environment, and economy.

Shorter, targeted professional development opportunities are also on the horizon. These offerings aim to make organisational focused leadership development more accessible locally, supporting people to build capability and confidence in their professional roles.

We will continue to shape a collaborative project with the eight other regional leadership organisations and Leadership Victoria, as we seek to build a shared understanding of how working in concert can extend impact and create new opportunities for our communities.

Our purpose remains anchored in collaboration, responsiveness, and inclusion. By investing in people and strengthening connections between communities, workplaces, and regions, we are contributing to the leadership that will shape the future of the places we love.



A great leader's courage to fulfill his vision comes from passion, not position.
— John Maxwell

“

Before you are a leader, success is all about growing yourself. When you become a leader, success is all about growing others.” — Jack Welch



Alpine Valleys
Community Leadership

Executive Officer

MOBILE 0417 348 547
EMAIL eo@avclp.org.au

Program Manager

MOBILE 0437 827 548
EMAIL leaders@avclp.org.au