



Women's Leadership and Business Collaboration

Project summary and activities report
2022

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Project Summary

The project, '**Women's Leadership and Business Collaboration**' is also known as 'Real Rural Women's Leadership' (RRWL) for social media and promotional purposes. The project ran from 1 August 2021 to 31 May 2022. The project was funded by the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment and led by Care Balonne, St George. Care Balonne contracted a team of academics from the University of the Sunshine Coast and Griffith University (Queensland) to deliver the RRWL milestones.

This report has been prepared by the research project team to provide an overview of the project's approach and activities.

The project aims and activity

The project aimed:

- **To increase income-earning capacity and employability** by enhancing the resilience of businesswomen operating in drought conditions who are affected by the Murray-Darling Basin Plan, by supporting them to attain greater business leadership and efficacy through providing workshops and mentoring with industry and academic experts in: women's leadership, strategic communication, and business development, and by enhancing economic development in the region of the Balonne Shire by enabling increased women's leadership, and entrepreneurial literacy for business development to create alternative revenue streams.
- **To provide local and regional benefits** by disseminating and sharing the best practice business models and practical strategic communication strategies from comparable communities living in similar drought conditions.
- **To facilitate social and economic benefits** during and beyond the project, by sharing stories of individual leadership, business processes, and new market transitioning via a range of local 'success' stories as well as national ones in the form of microdocumentaries and podcasts by entrepreneurs.

The research process

The first stage of the project involved the design and delivery of an initial online survey to determine the requirements of the participants from the Balonne Shire. The project team thematically analysed responses to this survey to identify the stated needs of the women. These findings then informed the design of the program, which comprised workshops and mentoring programs offered directly to the participants during the course of the project, and the curation of interviewees and topics for the podcast series. This section outlines the outcomes of the survey and provides an overview of the presenters, the thematic content of the workshop series, and the interviews and topics discussed in the podcast series.

Activities of the Research Project

In response to the research findings, RRWL developed a comprehensive program of workshops, mentoring opportunities, and a podcast series that acts as a public source of information of women discussing leadership, communication, and business. An overview of each activity is provided here:

- The workshop series comprised eight separate events focussing on either business skills or personal development, and were offered in-person at Care Balonne or online. Each workshop ran for between 2 hours and 4 hours, and were offered on different days of the week to maximise participation opportunities for the women who had work and/or childcare commitments. The workshops were supported by workbooks and video resources, and each participant was given access to these. The workshops were offered between October 2021 and April 2022.
- The RRWL team offered mentoring outside of the workshop settings. Initially, there was a strong level of interest in the mentoring program, particularly in communication, public relations and strategic communication, website development, social media planning and business development, however uptake was restricted by time and availability of those interested, as well as the time limit of the project. Several participants participated in this component of the program.
- A website-building program offered participants the opportunity to have a website produced by the RRWL team, with full graphic design, public relations and social media support in the set up.
- In response to specific feedback on the initial survey, the RRWL team curated a series of 30 podcasts featuring interviews with inspirational women from the Balonne Shire or with specific interests and successes related to the project aims in leadership, empowerment, rural/regional communities and economies. The podcasts were professionally produced and launched at a community event in St George on 11 May, 2022. The podcasts are an accessible resource and shownotes have been created for each episode. All podcasts can be accessed via the project website or by searching 'Real Rural Women's Leadership' under Apple podcasts or Spotify.

All resources created as an outcome of this project have been shared with Care Balonne to utilise as needed for future skills building workshops and events. We anticipate that these digital resources will continue to provide skills development and contribute to growing the capacity of women in the Balonne Shire to earn income and engage in employment opportunities into the future.

Early analysis of the impact of the project suggests that the participants benefitted from the opportunity to network and to learn from other participants' experiences. Additionally, participants reported feeling better prepared to execute their business ideas and strategies, particularly through skills acquisition and personal development. Another significant impact was that the women reported feeling more connected to each other and the team, and felt that their work and ambitions were valued by having the program tailored around their needs and locations. Participants reported that the digital repository would have future benefits with participants predicting that they would access these resources as they progressed with their business planning.

Details of project activities and approaches

Bespoke Workshop Series

In response to the initial survey outcomes, eight bespoke workshops were held in person and online. All workshops were recorded or recreated into shorter videos, and supported by an activity workbook which is available in the educational resource repository provided to Care Balonne. Care Balonne is able to download, repurpose and edit these resources as they deem appropriate.

Bespoke Mentoring Program

A one-to-one mentoring program was offered to workshop participants, Care Balonne's networks, and targeted audiences via a social media campaign, direct email, and in-person recommendations.

Bespoke Podcast Series

The RRWL team curated a series of 30 podcasts featuring interviews with inspirational women from the Balonne Shire, other regions, or metropolitan areas, with specific interests, connections, and successes in the rural/regional communities and economies. These podcasts provided informative, personal accounts and guidance from the women's own journeys through the business development process, from conceptualising business ideas, overcoming challenges inherent in rurality, communication strategies, self-led skills development to personal self-care and empowerment. The power of these podcasts emerges from the honesty and generosity of the interviewees.

The interviews were produced as broadcast-quality podcasts by Seek & Deploy, a RRR organisation. The podcasts are supported by show notes and visual content including a promotional video, which has been used to enhance the packaging and promotion of the podcasts.

The series was launched at a community event in St George on 11 May 2022. The podcasts are available on the project's website, (www.realruralwomensleadership.com), project social media, and through the common popular channels such as Spotify, Apple podcasts, and Google, and via Care Balonne.

The following table summarises the personnel and content of each podcast.

Real Rural Women's Leadership Podcast Series		
Interviewee	Presenter	Content
Robyn Furchmeister Manager and Chair Care Balonne (lead partner organisation), local councillor, Balonne Shire Council.	Dr Sarah Casey	Robyn has been in local government in the Balonne Shire, South West Qld, serving as a councillor for almost three decades. Robyn is also the Manager and Chair of Care Balonne. In this conversation we talk about women's survival through domestic violence; using digital connectivity to get businesses going, the towns of the Balonne Shire, local businesses, Robyn also discusses how people can connect with those in positions of authority (e.g. local council, Members of Parliament).
Robin McConachie, Rural journalist	Dr Gall Crimmins	Robin was a rural reporter on ABC Country Hour for three decades. She was a Director of the National Press Club, and is a member of the Queensland Rural Press Club's Hall of Fame. This conversation discusses the importance of rural reporting/rural journalism and oral history, and provides advice regarding career success and advice to women leaders.
Anne Miller Editor, southburnett.com.au	Prof. Jacqui Ewart	Editor of the online news site southburnett.com.au Anne Miller explains why the news site was established and its vital role in an area where there are few local sources of news. Our conversation focuses on why local news is vital for the health of rural communities. Podcast highlights include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of independent news providers in rural areas • Role of news site for rural area in disasters is crucial in the absence of other news interest, fills a gap when disaster strikes providing crucial local information. • Focus on positive stories is part of the mandate of The South Burnett news site. • Contribution to community is the driver of the rural news site.
Liz Hill, Founder of ConnectWest	Dr Karen Hands	Liz has lived and worked in Western Queensland all of her life. She founded Connect South West, an online information and networking site for the Balonne region in 2005. In this podcast, she talks about the importance of networking, taking risks and learning new skills.

Emily Martin	Dr Saskia de Klerk	Emily is a St. George local. She is the Human Resource Manager for Maranoa Mechanical, but also the author of the inspirational book, titled <i>The Gift</i> . Emily shares strategies for success with the audience.
Dr Kathomi Gatwiri, AWGSA President	Dr Gail Crimmins	Kathomi discusses the generosity of sponsorship and philanthropy and how they can change lives. Leadership for Kathomi is relational and advises aspiring leaders to “let the relationship be the foundation of mentorship and leadership”.
Donna Stewart, Grazier, and local government	Dr Sarah Casey	Local Balonne Shire resident and former Mayor and local government councillor of 30 years: Balonne Shire and Waroo Shire. Donna talks about what it takes to be a strong leader, and how to effect change. She talks also about the changing times and women who have influenced her on her journey.
Genevieve Jacobs	Prof. Jacqui Ewart	In this podcast, Genevieve discusses what's new in news media ventures, Viewers might take advice on how to operationalise such opportunities in rural Australia.
Lighthouse Group	Dr Saskia de Klerk	Lighthouse Business Innovation Centre is managed by Anna Pino (Director and Chief Executive Officer), and Candice Edge (Director and Commercialisation Manager). In this podcast they discuss strategies for business development with practical tools.
Charlotte Durack Graphic designer, founder of Studio Agriculture. Former Telstra Young Business Woman of The Year Finalist.	Dr Karen Hands	In this podcast, Charlotte shares her story about branching out and the risks she took in starting her own graphic design studio that caters for agribusinesses.
Sally Rigney, Cotton Qld Local Balonne Shire RRR woman and grazier, and former ABC Journalist	Dr Sarah Casey	Former ABC journalist, and Nindigully grazier who now works for Cotton Australia as regional manager, Sally talks about community building, and the importance of learning boundaries. She talks about those who inspire her and shares some of her journey from journalist to grazier. Sally's passion for the Balonne Shire is a tourism advertisement in and of itself in this podcast.
Lisa Annese, Chief Executive Officer of the Diversity Council Australia	Dr Gail Crimmins	The podcast focuses on how to use evidence when creating change and informing policy; the importance of influencing 'the power brokers of the status quo', and to use the language of your audience to maximise connection and influence.
Dr Amanda Gearing: Freelance investigative journalist and researcher, former	Prof. Jacqui Ewart	Dr Amanda Gearing explains what drew her to rural and regional journalism. She discusses some of the key stories she has investigated in rural and regional areas and the contribution her journalism has made to those

<p>rural and regional journalist.</p>		<p>communities. We discuss a different sort of leadership enmeshed in her approach to journalism.</p> <p>Podcast highlights include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value of contributing to rural communities through investigative journalism. • Importance of listening to those you interview and leaving space for them to tell their stories. • Leadership does not always involve a line of people following one person, but comes in different shapes including taking on an advocacy role to bring issues to the attention of those in power.
<p>Dr Nelia Hyndman-Rizk Senior Lecturer UNSW (Canberra)</p>	<p>Dr Saskia de Klerk</p>	<p>Nelia is a Senior Lecturer in Intercultural Management within the School of Business at UNSW (University of NSW), Canberra. Nelia transitioned from a stay-at-home Mum to an academic, and she discusses her expertise and this podcast will act as an invaluable resource for others, with research and lived experience informing this conversation.</p>
<p>Jane Harbison Education advocate and designer.</p>	<p>Dr Karen Hands</p>	<p>Jane Harbison grew up on a cattle property in Texas, Qld, and worked as an accountant before chasing her dream role in creative entrepreneurship. Jane discusses how to lean-in to failure.</p>
<p>Rechelle Leahy, National Rural Women's Coalition Board member, Gender Equality council. Former Telstra Business Woman of the Year; .Owner: Regional Collab.</p>	<p>Dr Sarah Casey</p>	<p>Rechelle Leahy is a leader across business, rural entrepreneurialism, and advocacy. She tells her story, and provides practical advice for those wanting to lead, grow their networks, as well as develop their own businesses.</p>
<p>Helen Tatchell Editor, The Moorabool News</p>	<p>Prof. Jacqui Ewart</p>	<p>This podcast discusses journalism in regional, remote and rural (RRR) communities.</p> <p>Editor of The Moorabool News, Helen Tatchell gives us some insights into why someone would continue putting out a local newspaper despite the trials and tribulations that come with running a local rural newspaper. She explains the crucial role of The Moorabool News plays in connecting the community particularly during disasters and the pandemic. This podcast will be important for local</p>

		community members seeking to start their own news service or transition to social media news sites.
Dr Pam Greet, Principal at Future Ag Qld	Dr Gail Crimmins	The podcast discusses the power of education for personal empowerment and change agency. She also discusses leadership based on enabling and facilitation, and the power that comes from cooperation and collaboration.
Julia Spicer: RRR OAM Entrepreneur based in SW Qld.	Dr Sarah Casey	Julia runs engage and create consulting, and is a passionate supporter of rural businesses, innovation, and for women having a seat at the table. Julia has a background in environmental science, has worked in sustainable agriculture and natural resource management projects, and with Traditional Owners. Julia chats as a business woman, but an advocate for communities and for other women. She shares strategies for others.
Prof Meredith Lawley Academic leader in Marketing and research in Food and Agriculture.	Dr Saskia de Klerk	Meredith worked for market research companies before becoming an academic in the late 1980s. Meredith had to make many career transitions and she talks about her support network and what made a difference in her development. This down-to-earth podcast will be informative and inspirational for women wanting to make career transitions and become leaders, as well as those already leading.
Natalie Leamy	Prof. Jacqui Ewart	This podcast discusses journalism in regional, remote and rural (RRR) communities. Natalie Leamy takes us on a quick tour through her varied and interesting career. Our conversation then turns to what is special about rural journalism. Podcast highlights include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being a rural journalist means contributing to your community and adding value to it. • Leadership comes in different forms in journalism and involves considering what is in the best interests of your community. • Tips for how to build relationships with journalists in rural areas.
Ann Ross, RRR Business Owner and QLD State Chair for the AgriFutures Rural Women's Award Committee	Dr Gail Crimmins	Ann discusses the importance of communication and building networks, and the homework and post networking follow ups needed to be done to make the most of networking opportunity.

Sarah Southern: Community Development Care Balonne St George	Dr Sarah Casey	Sarah Southern has lived in St George Qld for over a decade after growing up in rural NSW and travelling around with her family. Sarah is a wife, a mother of five sons, she works in community development with Care Balonne St George, and she also works with her husband. In this episode we discuss the housing issues facing rural Australia, local events, and the importance of community.
Assoc Prof Sue Williamson Academic HR (Human Resource) School of Business at UNSW, Canberra.	Dr Saskia de Klerk	Sue specialises in gender equality in the workplace, and public sector human resources and industrial relations. She talks about career transitions.
Joelle Compton: Transformational Coaching - Empowerment coach and counsellor	Dr Sarah Casey	In this podcast, Joelle discusses what empowerment might mean for women, how to build community, and how to look after oneself in the process of growth. She talks about starting her own business and the notion of 'resilience'
Jen Gourlay Editor and owner of the Biloela Beacon news site	Prof. Jacqui Ewart	<p>In this interview Jen Gourley highlights the passion that has underpinned her approach to rural and regional journalism for more than 20 years. She explains why she has continued to experiment with difference types of news outlets in a rural community and how these endeavours have contributed to the community.</p> <p>Podcasts highlight:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership is about putting a community's interests at the centre of journalism. • Local news is vital for the health of small communities. • The future of local news outlets in regional, rural and remote communities will be about experimentation.
Professor Tara Brabazon	Dr Sarah Casey	Professor Tara Brabazon is a leader in RRR education. She holds a Masters in Leadership and various other qualifications. Tara has held leadership roles around the world for over two decades, Tara is a recognised world leader in rural, regional and remote (including distance) education and shares advice on from what research tells us about leadership.
Barb McMillan, Citizen of the Year for Balonne Shire in 2000	Dr Gail Crimmins	Key ideas central to this podcast include 'love' of community and how we can let people know they are seen; caring for community is caring for self; and the importance of generosity.
Emily Watts Catlock Goats Stud,	Dr Karen Hands	Young local Balonne Shire woman, Emily is studying agribusiness in Geelong with the goal of supporting her

Agribusiness student		family's goat stud. This podcast discusses working hard, the importance of long-term plans and staying connected.
Margaret Simons PS Media Director and Editor at Large	Prof. Jacqui Ewart	New news ventures are discussed in the podcast including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advice for those seeking to have their voices heard and stories told. • The opportunities for those wanting to become journalists working in non-metropolitan areas including the suburbs, regional, rural and remote communities.
Gidgee Smith Gidgee Smith Bags, Gidgee's Bush Camp	Dr Karen Hands	Gidgee is a Morven local businesswoman who has successfully launched SMEs from her property. Gidgee discusses the evolution of her businesses and her role in promoting mental health and wellbeing throughout the regions.

Contribution to research

In summary, the project's activities, and the legacies of the project, will help the community to adapt to the effects of drought by diversifying potential revenue streams through advanced business skills, contributing to greater autonomy, well-being, and community-building. The activities were designed to build capacity in women's aspiration, career confidence, and leadership confidence and capabilities. Specifically, by building the capacity of women to identify new business or community organisation opportunities, the activities were designed to guide individual and market behaviour and thus support long-term cultural and economic change.

Contribution to the national priority of gender equality

The activities and legacies of the project contributes toward gender equality national priorities of the Australian Government. By bringing together voices and information from diverse women across various sectors, the project has forged dynamic networks of empowered women in rural areas. Thus, the work of this project team is cutting edge in that it is part of an emerging understanding of the necessity of rural planning.

Frank et al (2020) note rural areas comprise a significant fraction of the global land mass and are the setting for a number of critical food and natural resources. They produce virtually all the food, fibre, and minerals (Argent, 2017); supply most of the water used by cities (Brauman et al., 2007); and are the sites of important climate mitigation and alternative energy strategies (Woods, 2012). As a result, Frank et al. (2020) identify the necessity of effective rural planning for "the future not only of rural communities but to cities and, indeed, the Earth. Rural planning should be an important complement to urban planning"; yet rural areas are largely overlooked or mismanaged by the planning field, resulting in inequity and loss of rurality (p. 769). This project therefore is part of a rural planning project (akin to urban planning) which particularly engage the concept and practice of planning culture. Porter (2000, p. 14) defines culture as the "beliefs, attitudes, and values that bear on ... the activities of individuals, organizations, and other institutions."

