

AUSTRALIAN RURAL EDUCATION AWARD 1995

A CHALLENGE FOR THE FUTURE

Julie Ewers **Lucindale Area School Community**

As a parent involved at Lucindale Area School, and on behalf of Lucindale Area School and the community, I gladly accept this award and thank SPERA for choosing our school to be the winner of this award.

What has happened at Lucindale Area School definitely enhances education and does demonstrate a commitment towards advancing the positive aspects of rural education.

This award acknowledges the success we have achieved in solving our initial problems, it also acknowledges the very hard work carried out by our Principal, staff, parents, students and community members.

Lucindale is as the name implies, a school comprising of students from reception through to year 12. Our current enrolments are around 270. There are just over 70 secondary students. It is situated in the small rural township of Lucindale, a population of about 490 people. The nearest town is Naracoorte with a population of 5,000 - 42 kilometres away. Our largest closest regional town is Mt. Gambier, 120 kilometres away with a population of 23,000.

So we are very small and very rural..

My involvement as a parent at Lucindale Area School began in 1980 when our first son began school, our second son followed in 1982.

I became involved in the usual ways - helping out at canteen, listening to reading, parent debate, so I felt very much part of the school. We were happy with what was happening regarding our boys' learning. Staff welcomed involvement of parents, we were always kept well informed of what was going on. Any concerns we had were addressed promptly. During this time new facilities were built for the junior primary, as well as a library to be used by students and community.

However, as our boys progressed through primary school we began to address the issue of secondary schooling and became aware of quite a serious problem.

We realised there were no general academic studies to speak of offered at Lucindale. Students could only undertake the Agricultural Certificate course. Whilst there is nothing wrong with this course, not everyone wants to study agriculture.

We also realised that the buildings were in a dilapidated state and poorly equipped. Community confidence in Lucindale Area School was low, many students moved to the city to attend boarding school. There was even a bus transporting students to our neighbouring town of Naracoorte. At this point the secondary component of our school was in danger of closing down. Secondary enrolments were in between 25 - 30 students.

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A survey conducted revealed that many parents did not want closure, these parents wanted their children to complete their education at Lucindale Area School. Shortly after this a new principal, Doug Curtis, was appointed in 1988, he realised and understood our concerns and made a commitment to work alongside staff, students and parents to see what could be done to change the situation.

Time spent with parents, staff and students to see what each group wanted at Lucindale Area School as far as education goes resulted in a list of aims and objectives. This was the start of exciting happenings at Lucindale Area School.

At this time, I became a member of school council which began a very interesting, informative and rewarding time for me as a parent.

In 1989, the problem of lack of subject choice was addressed. The Open Access or distance education system was introduced into our school. This is now well established and combined with face to face teaching, over 40 secondary subjects are now available. Our school is South Australia's largest user of distance education and has pioneered technologies including DUCT and Electronic Classroom. We have been able to support other school communities using distant learner.

Proof of the success of distance learning is shown by the Merit Awards won by Year 12 students and students being placed in tertiary education. Students seeking employment on leaving school are also very successful.

In 1990, plans to undergo major upgrading of our buildings were set in motion. School council at this stage undertook the management of the project, this decision also enabled the community to be involved. Indeed the school council is an established contractor to the Government, managing a large part of the school's maintenance and development programme. We now have very adequate buildings for our secondary students, areas for science, computing, photography, open access, administration and staff preparation.

In 1991, decisions were made to broaden the areas studied in the Agricultural course by the commencement of an Agriculture facility, breeding marine and trout, this has been a progressive project over the last four years. This has almost been completed, to tidy up stage, and plans to construct a climate-controlled hatchery are underway. A Seminar, titled *'Introduction to Agriculture'* will be part of a programme to be used by the fishing industry as a learning tool for those entering the industry.

Several other projects are worthy of note. A cottage house facility was located adjacent to our school grounds in 1993. This facility enabled students from away to come to Lucindale Area School to study Agriculture and be assured of adequate accommodation.

In 1992-3, a dream began to become a reality of developing a sustainable agriculture farm. A place where farming techniques could be adopted that gave our up and coming young farmers an alternative, to the traditional ways of farming. It would also be a place that would involve all of our community.

Land has been purchased, preliminary work has begun, cleaning up, fencing. Some crops, trees and shrubs have already been planted, there is still much to be done but many people are looking forward to the development of this farm and the role it will play in the future of Lucindale Area School.

Over the last five years, our school has been the recipient of such awards as KESAB, five consecutive years,. Best Environmental Educational Programme, 1994 -95 State Landcare Award.

Many industries and community groups have supported our school in providing equipment, materials, time, finance or expertise. Government agencies have also shown confidence in our school and this has been reflected by the funding we have received.

Lucindale is now a school where students have choices, where they have a say. It is a school that is very creative in learning, offering a diverse number of experiences on and off school grounds.

The senior students receive tremendous support as they seek to work out their career paths. Our senior students are given great support as they meet the challenge of SACE - one way this is shown is through the opportunities of being able to access school buildings and equipment after school and on weekends.

In 1993-94, attention has turned to the students in years 5 - 9, developing a middle-school concept and looking at how best the needs of these students can be met.

My involvement at Lucindale Area School spanned fourteen years, ending in 1994. We do not regret leaving our boys at this rural school to complete their education, both our boys were successful in gaining employment.

HOWEVER I have done my bit to ensure that our school's enrolments remain as they are and in February this year, our third child began her schooling, so I will be around for another twelve years. As I continue to be involved, I will be keen to see how our school continues to develop and certainly all who are involved will need to be alert and challenged so what has been achieved will be built upon so the needs of our children can continue to be met at their **local rural school**.

Thank you once again to SPERA for this award.