Hearing the concerns of regional educators



By Natalie Blewitt
Senior Vice President

The Rural and Remote Education Advisory Council (RREAC) was established in 1997 and fulfils an important role, reporting directly to the Minister for Education. It is responsible for providing strategic advice on education and training issues and development in rural and remote areas of Western Australia.

Being a member of the council is by ministerial appointment and I am honoured to be representing the SSTUWA on the council, providing a voice for public education.

Every year, the RREAC (pictured below) undertakes a regional itinerary and this year, members of council visited several sites in Albany and participated in a community forum to capture the accomplishments and challenges in the region, focusing on the areas of secondary (Years 10-11) and post-secondary student transitions.

Sites visited included WA College of Agriculture in Denmark, North Albany Senior High School, South Regional TAFE and Albany Residential College. Opportunities were afforded at each site to explore, ask questions and speak with students.

The community forum saw representatives from schools and organisations outlining what currently was working well, what were challenges and what additional support was needed. Some common themes included:

- A lack of equity of opportunity for regional schools and TAFE (when compared to students in the metropolitan area).
- The need to better support diversity.
- Improvement in conditions to attract and retain school and TAFE staff.
- Additional financial assistance for the region.
- Concerns for the mental health and wellbeing of students.
- Schools work for those students who fit the model pathway. Those who don’t, disengage easily.
- Improvements in public transport being needed.
- The Online Literacy and Numeracy Assessment and WA Certificate of Education are barriers.

A formal report for the education minister is being prepared. The key observations and themes as determined by the members of the RREAC were: mental health/wrap around support services and wellbeing; partnerships are keys to success; equity and opportunity (including choice, options and resources; regional barriers).

Reignite Your Passion

Almost 70 early childhood educators (ECE) were invited to reignite their passion when they attended the annual SSTUWA Early Childhood Educators Conference in early August. This event provided our ECE members with the opportunity to learn, listen, share ideas and refresh their minds.

The Hon. Dr Anne Aly, Federal Minister for Early Childhood Education, opened the conference. SSTUWA President Matt Jarman addressed the conference, providing a valuable update to members in the ECE space. Attendees found his presentation to be “very honest and insightful,” “engaging and informative,” and “very in touch with the reality and real world.”

The always energetic Tammy-Anne Caldwell from Above and Beyond Education was the featured speaker. Tammy-Anne spoke about why a brain-based holistic approach to wellbeing, teaching and learning makes sense.

Our breakout workshops were very well received and presented by Edith Cowan University early childhood studies lecturer Dr Kay Ayre and Tammy-Anne, who continued to explore the brain. Our final workshop presenter, Hilary Keegan, Director of School of Musical Heartbeats, had attendees actively participating in a hands-on dynamic workshop.

Participants later heard on topics including the Voice to Parliament (facilitated by union vice president Sharmila Nagar); climate change/sustainability (hosted by Growth Team officer Chloe Hosking); and violence in schools (facilitated by WHS organiser Antony Pearson). I had the privilege of presenting information about the 2023 proposed Log of Claims.

It was wonderful to see so many engaged ECE members and as one attendee put it – “lovely to have the opportunity to spend a day with like-minded people”.

Such an event would not be possible without our outstanding Education and Training Centre team. Thanks to them for another simply brilliant event, as well as to all participants and presenters.

Authorised by Sally Dennis, General Secretary, The State School Teachers' Union of W.A.
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