

CHAIRMAN'S FAREWELL

After more than a decade of dedicated service to the Bush Children's Education Foundation, including 12 years as Chairman, Richard Dougan stepped down from the role in March 2026.

His retirement follows a significant period in BCEF's history, including the Foundation's 60th Anniversary celebrations, the expansion of bursary and scholarship programs, and the launch of the Bush2TAFE initiative supporting vocational education pathways for rural students.

Richard's leadership, commitment and advocacy have helped ensure that young people from rural and regional communities can access educational opportunities regardless of where they live.

On behalf of the Board, staff, donors and the many families supported by BCEF, we thank Richard for his outstanding contribution and wish him every success for the future.

"It is with considerable sadness that I write this article for the 2026 Newsletter with my retirement as Chairman of the BCEF Board. The past 12 years of my involvement have gone in a flash as happens when you are enjoying what you do and "kicking goals" as I believe BCEF has done in this time. Obviously, our success has been achieved through the generosity and commitment of the many individuals and corporate organisations and the hard work and commitment of all our Directors and wonderful support staff.

Over the past decade, the Bush Children's Education Foundation (BCEF) has continued its mission of supporting young people from rural and regional New South Wales to access education and opportunity. The journey has been one of growth, resilience, and renewal — shaped by the fantastic generosity of our supporters, the dedication of our volunteers and board members, and the determination of the students and families that we support, BCEF exists to serve.



Richard Dougan receiving his OAM

In 2014, I joined the BCEF Board, bringing with me a strong commitment to young people's education and country communities. Over the following years, and particularly during my 12 years as Chairman, BCEF was fortunate to experience a period of significant demand, progress and impact.

One of the most important achievements of the past decade has been the substantial increase in the value of scholarships and bursaries. As the cost of education, accommodation, travel, and training continued to rise, BCEF responded by expanding the level of financial assistance available to students. This ensured that more young Australians could continue their studies and pursue their ambitions, regardless of distance or circumstance.

The Foundation also broadened its vision through the introduction of the Bush2TAFE program. Recognising that success takes many different pathways, BCEF expanded its support beyond traditional academic routes to include vocational education and training.

The Bush2TAFE initiative opened new opportunities for students seeking practical skills, apprenticeships, and career-focused education, helping young people build futures that remain closely connected to regional NSW.

Throughout these years, BCEF adapted to changing times while staying true to its original purpose: giving country children the chance to achieve their potential through education.

A major milestone came with the celebration of BCEF's 60th anniversary - a moment to reflect on six decades of service to rural families and communities. The Anniversary, which was wonderfully supported by our Patron, the Governor of New South Wales Her Excellency the Honourable Margaret Beazley AC KC and her husband Mr Dennis Wilson recognised not only the Foundation's history, but also the thousands of students whose lives have been shaped by educational support over generations.

Behind every scholarship has been a story: students travelling long distances to school, families making sacrifices to support education, and young people gaining the confidence to pursue careers and dreams that once felt beyond reach.

The last ten years have demonstrated the enduring importance of BCEF's work. Through leadership, generosity, and community spirit, the Foundation has continued to evolve while remaining firmly committed to its founding belief — that where a young person lives should never limit the opportunities they can access.

As BCEF looks to the future, it does so with pride in its achievements and optimism for the next generations of rural and regional students.

It has been a privilege to serve alongside such dedicated Directors and staff, and to witness firsthand the impact BCEF has on young people's lives. I leave the Foundation confident that it remains in capable hands and well positioned to continue supporting future generations of rural students."



Richard Dougan OAM

Welcoming New Director Ben Hamilton

The Bush Children's Education Foundation of NSW welcomed a new Director in February 2026.



Ben Hamilton brings extensive experience in corporate affairs, stakeholder engagement and strategic communications. Having grown up in the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area, attended boarding school with the support of a country student bursary, and studied at a regional university, he has a strong appreciation of the challenges facing rural students and the important role BCEF plays in supporting educational opportunities across regional NSW.

Board Leadership Update

Following Richard Dougan's retirement as Chairman, Andrew Heaven was appointed Acting Chairman. The Board remains focused on supporting rural and regional students through BCEF's bursary, scholarship and Bush2TAFE programs.

Current BCEF Board

Position	Name
Acting Chairman	Andrew Heaven
Treasurer	John McRae
Education Director	Kerry Blight
Directors	Jenetta Russell OAM, Sarah Mitchell MLC, Joy Dodds, Ben Hamilton
Board Secretary	Helen Rath
Social Media Officer	Sarah Pratt

Education Should Not Depend on Your Postcode

Recent NAPLAN results continue to highlight the educational divide between students living in major cities and those in remote Australia. **Educational disparities continue to exist between metropolitan, regional and remote students.**

Increasing Support for Rural Families in 2026

Even with government assistance, BCEF families report an **average boarding fee shortfall of approximately \$13,000** per student each year

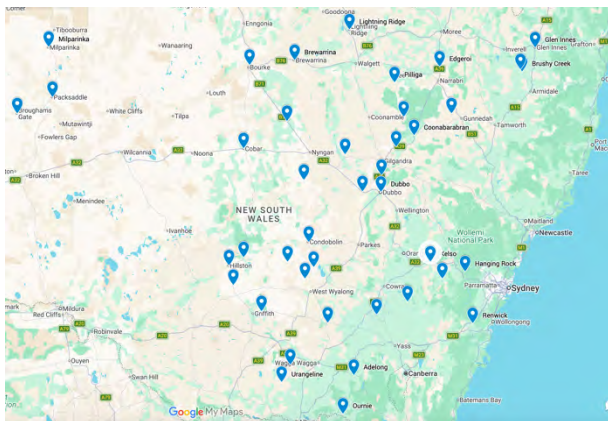
In response to rising boarding and education costs, BCEF increased its Rural Secondary Boarding Bursary from \$2,000 to **\$3,000 per student in 2026.**

2026 BCEF Bursary Snapshot

- ☀ 69 applications
- ☀ 48 bursaries approved
- ☀ 41 rural communities
- ☀ Average boarding gap \$13,000

The map highlights the 41 NSW rural communities represented by BCEF Bursary applicants in 2026. 65% of applying families lived between 30-320km away from the nearest government school.

48 bursaries have been approved at a total cost of around \$142,000. These bursaries support young people from 40 families, with the students attending 13 NSW rural boarding schools.



Challenges Facing Rural Students in 2026

For many young people living in rural and remote NSW, accessing education continues to involve challenges rarely experienced by their city peers.

Distance remains one of the greatest barriers. Many BCEF-supported students live between 30 and 320 kilometres from the nearest government secondary school, making boarding school the only practical option for accessing secondary education.

Rural families also continue to face significant financial pressures associated with:

- ☀ Boarding school fees
- ☀ Long-distance travel and fuel costs
- ☀ Uniforms, textbooks and technology
- ☀ Sporting, agricultural and extracurricular activities
- ☀ Reduced local access to specialist subjects and support services.

Despite these challenges, rural students continue to demonstrate remarkable resilience, adaptability and commitment to their education and communities.

BCEF remains committed to helping reduce these barriers through our

- ☀ Rural Boarding Bursary
- ☀ Bush2TAFE programs
- ☀ University Scholarships

ensuring that distance and disadvantage do not determine educational opportunity for young people in the bush.

Supporting future rural communities means supporting future farmers, nurses, teachers, tradespeople and community leaders.



Helping Bush Kids Access a TAFE Education

In 2025, BCEF expanded its educational support programs through the introduction of **Bush2TAFE** - a new initiative designed to assist rural and remote students pursuing vocational education and practical skills training.

While university pathways are important, BCEF recognised that many young people in the bush also seek careers through TAFE and vocational education in areas critical to regional communities and industries.

Why Bush2TAFE Matters

-  Supports vocational pathways
-  Addresses regional workforce shortages
-  Helps with travel, accommodation, fuel and equipment costs
-  Limited local course availability
-  Distance from major training centres
-  Supports future regional workforce needs

Bush2TAFE was developed to help address these barriers and support practical employment pathways for rural youth.

The program aims to support students undertaking fee-free and vocational training courses in areas such as:

-  Agriculture and related industries
-  Nursing and health support services

In 2026, BCEF is pleased to have the support of BNP Paribas for the **BNP Paribas Bush2TAFE Programme**. Their commitment will help expand access to vocational education opportunities for rural and regional students, supporting pathways into industries that are vital to the future of regional communities and the NSW economy.



CSU University Scholarship Program

BCEF continues to support rural and regional students pursuing tertiary education through its University Scholarship Program in partnership with Charles Sturt University. In 2026, Bella Havercroft was awarded a BCEF scholarship, joining a growing cohort of students who are building their futures through higher education.



Bella Havercroft (right) receiving her BCEF scholarship from Professor Jenny Kent, Deputy Dean, Faculty of Business, Justice and Behavioural Sciences.

These scholarships help ease the financial burden associated with living away from home while studying and provide valuable support during the transition from school to university.

BCEF gratefully acknowledges the generosity of the individuals, families and organisations whose donations make these scholarships possible. Their support is helping young people from rural and regional NSW access opportunities that may otherwise be beyond reach, while encouraging the development of future leaders and professionals for regional communities.

Thank You to Our Scholarship Supporters

BCEF sincerely thanks our donors whose generosity supports our University Scholarship Program, including The Military and Hospitaller Order of St Lazarus of Jerusalem and The Yim Family Foundation. Their investment in education is helping rural and regional students pursue their goals and contribute to the future of Regional NSW.



Every contribution helps bridge the gap between potential and opportunity, ensuring that distance or disadvantage does not determine a young person's future.

Thank you to all our donors who generously support us in helping young people attend school, TAFE and university in rural NSW.

BCEF does not receive any government support to fund our bursary and scholarship programs for eligible students. We rely solely on private and corporate donations to help educate young people in remote rural NSW.



BCEF is a Registered Charity with tax deductible status as a Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR1), where donations over \$2 are tax deductible.

PayPal

Visit www.bcef.org.au and click the yellow donate button to access the PayPal BCEF donation page or scan QR Code below.



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BSB: 062-195 Account Number: 10104674
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Payable to Bush Children's Education Foundation of NSW. Post to PO Box 138, Lindfield, NSW, 2070 [with name and address details for receipting](#).

Investing in education • Strengthening regional communities • Supporting future rural leaders