

Celebrating 60 Years of Educational Impact in Rural and Remote NSW



Students at the Dingo Fence 1962



Students at Tibooburra Hostel 1962



Students at the Dingo Fence 1962

Welcome to our June 2025 Newsletter which we hope will provide you with an insight into the positive benefits of secondary and tertiary assistance from the educational support we have provided to families and young people in the NSW outback for 60 years.

In 1965, our founding Directors - Dr Charles Huxtable MC & Bar (RFDS Broken Hill), Sir Leslie Herron (Chief Justice of NSW), the Rt. Hon. Ian Sinclair AC, and Mr Ian M. Hardy (Zinc Corporation) - formed the Bush Children's Hostel Foundation to address the urgent need for secondary education access for isolated students. Their vision led to the establishment of 23 hostels across NSW, allowing bush children to board in towns and attend local schools.

As needs evolved and with government support the Foundation shifted its focus from hostels to assisting students at regional boarding schools. This evolution gave rise to the Bush Children's Education Foundation of NSW (BCEF), which has now supported remote NSW families for 60 years - from the Dingo Fence to the Sandstone Curtain.

BCEF's impact is deeply felt in communities where distance, isolation, and limited school resources can hinder a child's education and social development. Our secondary bursaries help families overcome these barriers, giving students the chance to thrive and make lasting memories - on the sporting field, in the classroom, and beyond.

We hope our latest Newsletter offers insight into the transformative role of BCEF in rural education in NSW. From children at the Dingo Fence to today's scholarship recipients, our mission remains the same: to break down barriers and give every bush child a fair go.

Government House Reception

On 3 April 2025, BCEF's 60th Anniversary was commemorated at Government House Sydney, hosted by our Patron, Her Excellency the Honourable Margaret Beazley AC KC. Her Excellency paid tribute to BCEF's founders and the continued work addressing the "tyranny of distance" for bush students. The Governor praised the enduring impact of over 3,000 students supported since 1965 and officially launched our new Bush2TAFE initiative. The evening highlighted the Foundation's past achievements and bold plans for the future. Read the Governor's speech [online](#) or visit www.bcef.org.au.

Reflections from Founding Director, the Rt Hon Ian Sinclair AC

Mr Sinclair recently shared memories of BCEF's origin in 1965, when educational opportunity and travelling in the far outback was extraordinarily challenging. Roads were predominantly gravel, very poorly maintained and railway access limited. Travel and accommodation were costly and difficult. The only government education was access to correspondence lessons. He praised the vision of Dr Charles Huxtable, who worked through the Royal Flying Doctor Service to establish boarding hostels and bursaries for rural children. Mr Sinclair noted the Foundation's inclusive support - regardless of background - and commended the ongoing generosity that sustains BCEF's mission 60 years on.

Honouring a Founder: Dr Charles Huxtable

In a tribute to his late father, Bernard Huxtable recalled how Dr Charles Huxtable's passion for education began during WWI and deepened while serving as a Flying Doctor. Seeing firsthand the educational neglect of bush children, he raised funds to establish hostels like the one at Tibooburra. His legacy lives on through BCEF's continued work. As Bernard wrote, "He looked after the families who worked on the dingo fence... their children were under-educated due to lack of school access."

There he became very aware of the limited educational and social opportunities for children on properties in isolated parts of NSW. Dr Huxtable worked with politicians like Ian Sinclair and The Barrier Industrial Council to fight such perils of isolation affecting students from these families.

The Bush Children's Hostel Foundation was formally established in Broken Hill in 1965, helping to develop government-run hostels for isolated students in towns such as Bourke, Tibooburra, Wentworth and 20 other sites. It became an education foundation when regional boarding schools replaced hostels.

Government House Reception - Gallery Snapshot



Kerry Blight, Andrew Heaven, Richard Dougan, Her Excellency, the Hon..Margaret Beazley AO KC Governor of NSW & Jenetta Russell



Rowan & Theresa Huxtable



Joy Dodds & Nicole Sadler



Pamela Dowling, Martin Dowling & Hilda Younes



Ian McNamara & Jenetta Russell



Robert & Tish Miller



Phillip Meagher & Katie Gay



John Grenshaw & Andrew Heaven



Katherine Balding, Susan Bennett & Maddy Kirshner

Searching for Ian Hardy – A Founding Director of BCEF

As we celebrate 60 years of the Bush Children's Education Foundation, we honour the contributions of our four founding directors: Dr Charles Huxtable MC & Bar, Sir Leslie Herron, Rt. Hon. Ian Sinclair AC, and Mr Ian Hardy, then Assistant General Manager of Zinc Corporation in Broken Hill.

Mr Hardy was an influential figure in the mining community during the 1950s, regularly referenced in the local newspaper 'The Barrier Miner' and official documents from the era. He served as Surface Superintendent and later Assistant General Manager (Services) for the Zinc Corporation and New Broken Hill Consolidated Limited, both subsidiaries of BHP. A 1954 news article mentions Mr Hardy returning from a business trip abroad with his wife and daughters - Margaret Ann, Helen, and Allison. The Hardy family resided in Broken Hill and had close ties with local and interstate communities in Sydney and Adelaide.

His leadership and commitment to rural education were instrumental in the Foundation's establishment in 1965, and his legacy remains part of our story.



Can You Help?

If any of our readers have further information about Ian Hardy or are in contact with his family, we would love to hear from you. Please contact BCEF at info@bcef.org.au or phone 0412 879 236 to help us reconnect with this important chapter in our history.



Celebrating Amelia Donnelly: From Bursary Recipient to Registered Nurse

We proudly celebrate Amelia, the first BCEF student to receive support through both our bursary and university scholarship programs. Amelia grew up in Condobolin and attended Red Bend Catholic College as a boarder, later graduating with a



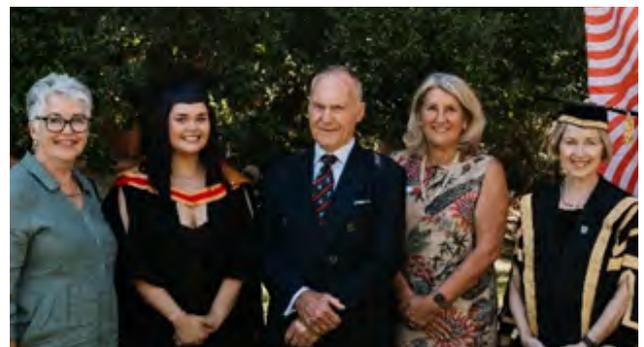
Amelia and her mother Stephanie

Bachelor of Nursing degree from Charles Sturt University in April 2025. Amelia now works as a Registered Nurse at Orange Base Hospital.

In her BCEF scholarship application, Amelia wrote that she chose this degree as a proud Aboriginal woman passionate about improving the health and well-being of all Australians - particularly indigenous communities.

"The Bush Children's Foundation has supported my family throughout my high school years and again when I started my journey at Charles Sturt University," Amelia said. "I lived on the CSU Wagga Wagga campus, three hours from home, and the scholarship was very helpful with expenses such as rent, travel, and student placements." The scholarship helped ease financial pressures and stay focused on her studies.

Amelia's story is one of resilience, gratitude, and achievement, serving as a powerful inspiration to the next generation of rural students.



Leslie Dougan, Amelia Donnelly, Richard Dougan, Sarah Ansell, Director, Advancement Office & Professor Renée Leon PSM, Vice-Chancellor and President

2025 Secondary Rural Boarding Bursaries

Each year rural families living in remote parts of NSW face new challenges and each year BCEF receives applications for Boarding Bursaries. This year we received 62 applications indicating the continuing need for educational support by rural families. 53% of applicants were landowners. The map shows the 35 remote areas where these applicants live. 69% of applying families lived between 30-285km away from the nearest government school. Following a detailed assessment of these applications, about 50 bursaries will be awarded at a total cost of around \$100,000. These bursaries support young people from 38 families, with the students attending 14 boarding schools throughout country NSW.



If you know anyone who needs help, please let us know, or have them contact us, or apply for support from www.bcef.org.au

Schools Supported in 2025

Calrossy Anglican School, Tamworth

Farrer Memorial Agricultural High School

Frensham Schools, Mittagong

Hurlstone Agricultural High School

Kildare Catholic College, Wagga Wagga

Macquarie Anglican Grammar School

New England Girls School

Presbyterian Ladies Collage Armidale

Red Bend Catholic College, Forbes

Scots All Saints, Bathurst

Snowy Mountains Grammar School

St Gregory's College, Gregory Hills

St Paul's College, Walla Walla

Yanco Agricultural High School

Insights from BCEF Bursary Families

What our 2024 survey revealed about the impact of the BCEF secondary rural boarding bursary support.

Why Families Choose Rural Boarding Schools:

- **48%** sought broader opportunities - academic and extracurricular
- **40%** prioritised the quality of education
- **25%** access to agriculture-related subjects
- **25%** appreciated proximity to home

Key Benefits of Receiving a BCEF Bursary:

The bursary has proven vital in areas of student life:

- **60%** reported a more supportive experience with peers.
- **30%** cited enhanced access to school activities
- **15%** reported benefits that were financial, academic, and personal
- **10%** acknowledged its role in easing education-related expenses

Success Stories:

- **Leadership:** Several students were appointed prefects or school captains
- **Academic Progress:** Improved results and entry into gifted programs
- **Extracurricular Excellence:** Success in agriculture, sports, and competitions
- **Personal Growth:** Increased confidence, independence, and resilience

Challenges for Rural Families:

- **89%** cited the cost of school fees
 - **84%** noted the challenge of distance from school
 - **63%** faced limited subject options locally
 - **47%** struggled with travel costs
- Other concerns included lack of transport, absence of gifted programs, and very small class sizes

The Impact of the BCEF Bursary

- **100% of surveyed families** agreed the bursary made a meaningful difference
- It **reduced financial stress**, enabling families to make the best educational choices
- Some families stated they **could not have accessed suitable education** without BCEF.

University Scholarship Program - Charles Sturt University

Our university scholarship program is seen as an extension of our Rural Secondary School Boarding Program by providing funds for isolated and economically disadvantaged students living away from home to stay in a university college or hall of residence. The essential aim is to provide some means to improve the student's ability to succeed at university. This year we have continued to fund our expanded scholarship program with our current students.

We are delighted with the academic performance of all our scholars, and we wish them continued success.

The BCEF Education Committee selection panel was again privileged to interview outstanding candidates for the BCEF CSU Scholarships. We would be delighted to award further scholarships when more funds are available. This would help mitigate the severe financial hardship experienced by many country students from isolated areas as they undertake tertiary studies.

We sincerely thank the **Order of St Lazarus of Jerusalem** and **Yim Family Foundation** for their support and sponsorship of four students.

BCEF CSU Scholarship Program Funding (2025 to 2027)

Year Awarded	Year Complete	Student Name	Degree
2022	2026	Charlotte Cody	Medicine
2022	2026	Brianna Mead	Medicine
2022	2026	Bridie Minehan	Veterinary Science
2024	2026	Tess Power	Nursing
2025	2027	Lachlan Cook	Veterinary Science
2025	2027	Audrey Lieschke	Medical Radiation
2025	2027	Abbey Hamblyn	Primary Education

Congratulations to the 2025 BCEF & Order of St Lazarus sponsored scholarships



Audrey Lieschke, BCEF Scholarship recipient and Tom Burton, Executive Director, CSU Office of Engagement and Enterprise



Celebrating CSU Scholarship recipients at Port Macquarie, with BCEF's support for rural students acknowledged and appreciated. Similar events were held at Wagga and Albury campuses.

"Providing this scholarship to a student like myself, who is from a rural background and has faced difficulty finding opportunities for further study, has instilled more motivation that I have chosen the right career and right pathway in choosing to live and work rurally after finishing my studies." A. Lieschke

Bush2TAFE: Helping Bush Youth Train Locally



Bush2TAFE 2025

LEARN NEW SKILLS NOW




DO YOU NEED \$\$\$ FOR YOUR STUDIES?

UP TO \$4,500 FOR SUCCESSFUL APPLICANTS
TO ASSIST GAP FUNDING FOR:



Course Fees



Accommodation



Transportation

NSW Fee-Free training is fully funded by the NSW & Commonwealth Governments

See <https://skills.education.nsw.gov.au/nsw-fee-free/agriculture-forestry-fishing>

Visit Our Website
www.BCEF.org.au

APPLY NOW

We have been continually reviewing the potential to support Post-Secondary Non-Tertiary Programs in the Bush and have now developed our **Bush2TAFE support program**.

This program, which was announced by our Patron Her Excellency, the Honourable Margaret Beazley AO KC Governor of New South Wales at a Function at Government House Sydney recently.

The **Bush2TAFE** program provides up to \$4,500 in funding to support isolated young people attending fee-free TAFE courses in Agriculture and related fields. The support covers travel, accommodation, and course-related expenses. With rural youth eager to gain practical skills and stay connected to their communities, **Bush2TAFE** fills a vital gap in post-school support. For further details visit www.bcef.org.au/bush2tafe.

This initiative ensures young people who may not pursue university education can still gain practical, employable skills. By supporting courses in agriculture and related fields, **Bush2TAFE** also addresses skills shortages in agriculture and rural industries and empowers youth to stay and contribute to their local regions, strengthening bush communities from within.

Social Media posts to launch the program -

NOW



WANT \$\$ TO STUDY AGRICULTURE THROUGH TAFE?

Students can receive up to **\$4,500** for travel, course fees and accommodation!

APPLY TODAY FOR OUR **NEW 'Bush2TAFE'** grant today!




WANT \$\$ FOR STUDY & LEARN NEW SKILLS?

BUSH2TAFE

APPLY NOW FOR BCEF GRANT TO STUDY AGRICULTURE AT TAFE! SUCCESSFUL APPLICANTS CAN RECEIVE UP TO \$4,500!

APPLY NOW

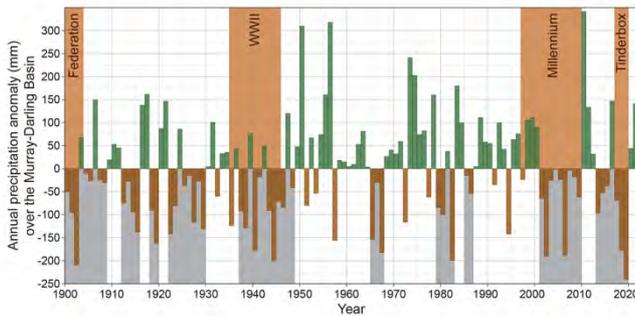
* For NSW Government's fee-free TAFE courses in Agriculture.
Grant includes:

- Travel Assistance
- Course Fee Assistance
- Accommodation Assistance



Economic and Environmental Factors

As climate challenges continue to affect rural and remote communities, the connection between drought and BCEF bursary demand has become increasingly clear.



Falster, G. M. et al.: Potential for historically unprecedented Australian droughts from natural variability and climate change, *Hydrol. Earth Syst. Sci.*, 28, 1383–1401, 2024.
<https://hess.copernicus.org/articles/28/1383/2024/>

The above graph tracks how much rain fell in the Murray–Darling Basin (MDB) each year from 1900 to 2022, compared to the long-term average.

Green bars = Years with more rain than usual.
Brown bars = Years with less rain than usual.
Orange shading = Major historical droughts (e.g., Federation, WWII, Millennium, Tinderbox)
Grey shading = Additional multi-year droughts identified using a method called “2S2E,” which looks for at least two dry years in a row.

The Tinderbox drought (2017–2020) is the most recent drought shown, with a sharp and extended period of low rainfall.

Recent analysis highlights strong correlation between major drought periods in NSW and surges in applications for BCEF bursary support. During the severe 2017–2020 Tinderbox Drought, one of the worst on record, BCEF recorded a dramatic rise in BCEF bursary applications:

- **Applications jumped from 50 in 2019 to 142 in 2020 (increase of 284%)**, as rural families faced prolonged hardship from failed crops, reduced farm income, and increased living costs.
- **Elevated demand continued through 2021–2023**, even as drought conditions eased, reflecting the long tail of recovery for drought-affected communities.

This trend reinforces the importance of BCEF bursary support during and after natural disasters, ensuring young people from rural NSW can continue their education despite challenging conditions.

BCEF remains committed to helping families navigate both the immediate and lasting impacts of climate-driven hardship.

Why This Matters

Climate patterns are becoming more extreme and unpredictable. Graphs like this one help us understand just how often rural communities are affected by drought - and why organisations like BCEF must be ready to support education access when it matters most.

Help Us Keep the Path to Education Open

BCEF continues to work hard to secure funding for our core programs - rural secondary boarding bursaries, CSU scholarships, and now our new Bush2TAFE initiative, which supports post-secondary non-tertiary training for young people from isolated communities.

These programs are life-changing, but they also come with real costs - especially for students who face extra hurdles such as accommodation, travel, regulatory fees, and safety compliance.

We are seeking ongoing support to fund any or all of our below programs:

1. **Rural Boarding School Bursary** - \$2,000 pa per student
2. **CSU University Scholarship** - \$3,300 pa for 3–4 years
3. **Bush2TAFE Support** up to \$4,500 per student.

Your support will directly empower students to stay engaged in education, build skills, and contribute meaningfully to their communities. **Let's work together to create long-term impact in the bush.** To discuss partnership opportunities or tailor a funding package, please contact Richard Dougan at rdougan@bcef.org.au.

Directors & Staff as of 1st June 2025

Chairman

Richard Dougan BA, CMC, FIMC, Cert IV & Dip Proj Mgmt

Vice Chairman & Public Officer

Andrew Heaven BA Dip FP CFP JP

Treasurer & Chair Finance & Investment Committee

John McRae BA, MComm, FCPA, FCA, AICD, JP

Chair Education, Scholarships & Bursaries Committee

Kerry Blight BA, DipEd, LttB, MEd

Jenetta Russell OAM GAICD CCEO

Rod Cowdroy BBus

Joy Dodds BEc (Hons), Post Grad Dip AFTVS

The Hon Sarah Mitchell MLC, BA

Board Secretary - Helen Rath BSc, Grad Dip ComMgt

Social Media Officer - Sarah Pratt BComm (Media)



Help Our Bush Kids with Educational Opportunities

BCEF Making a Difference

To all our supporters and stakeholders, thank you for your ongoing support. It does not take much for our climate conditions to change things in the bush. We expect to maintain similar funding requirements for our Bursary, Bush2TAFE and Scholarship Programs into the future and will always need your generous support to achieve this.

Kind regards



Richard Dougan – Chairman
0412377989

rdougan@bcef.org.au

Bush Children's Education Foundation of NSW Inc.

Direct Deposit

Name: Bush Children's Education Foundation
BSB: 062-195 Account Number: 10104674
Reference: Your Name

PayPal

Visit www.bcef.org.au and click the yellow donate button to access the PayPal BCEF donation page.

Cheque

Payable to Bush Children's Education Foundation of NSW. Post to PO Box 138, Lindfield, NSW, 2070.

BCEF Contact Details

PO Box 138, Lindfield NSW 2070

Phone: 0412879236 Email: info@bcef.org.au



BCEF is a Registered Charity with tax deductible status as a Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR).