



Towns and Villages Futures Program

Milparinka – success story

Challenges and opportunities

Milparinka is a tiny hamlet that epitomises the heart of the Australian outback. The community is located in the remote Corner Country where New South Wales (NSW) abuts the borders of South Australia and Queensland. There is no local council as this area is unincorporated.

Milparinka is a success story about what can happen when a community bands together to revitalise the spirit of a place.

Once described as a ghost town, Milparinka was little more than a few people sharing a common post code for most of its history. With just a pub, a kangaroo meat processing plant and a few dilapidated historic buildings, there was little sense of identity or community purpose.

While very isolated, Milparinka is a significant site for the area's indigenous people, and is steeped in heritage and history. In 1845, the famous explorer Charles Sturt and his expedition to find Australia's 'inland sea', spent six months camped near Milparinka. In the late 1870s, gold was discovered nearby and the town was founded next to the Evelyn Creek. By the 1920s, gold mining had become unsustainable, and the town sank back into obscurity.

The Milparinka Heritage and Tourism Association, which was established in 2000, perceives the past as the key to Milparinka's future.

A program for change

The Milparinka Heritage and Tourism Association was formed by a very small group of locals who wanted to reinvigorate the town and preserve the rich heritage of the region. The Association has proved to be a framework for the community to work together co-operatively on a bold vision for the future and is widely considered to have given a sense of community ownership to the people in the area.

Over the past five years, the Association has worked effectively to develop and oversee a diverse range of heritage and tourism projects within Milparinka, starting with a strategic community plan, a tourist marketing plan, and a website.

Goals

The first goal of the Association was to develop and disseminate information about Milparinka, with the eventual aim of marketing the area as a day-long tourist destination.

A website dedicated to the area was developed in 2000. Comprehensive and interactive, the Milparinka web pages include local information, a regional map, a listing of attractions, and details about accommodation and tours, as well as outback stories and community news. Visit the site at www.outbacknsw.com.au.

The Association has also organised significant events to publicise Milparinka and raise its profile as a tourist destination. The first Once a Jolly Swagman Festival took place in 2003 and was repeated in 2004 and 2005.

Projects

An impressive range of projects has been initiated and completed in Milparinka within the past five years.

In March 2005, the restored Milparinka Police Barracks was opened as a Visitor Information Centre and souvenir shop. The Centre operates as a local history resource, combining the facilities of the adjoining Courthouse and an art gallery located in the former police cells.

In November 2002, the Milparinka Courthouse was opened as a local history centre. Some 70 volumes of local history, aboriginal interpretive material, exploration and local family history have been printed and are now available for visitors.

The Association has published a range of locally significant post and gift cards and was instrumental in developing the Corner Country Guide, which is now into its second printing. This project has been in conjunction with Tibooburra Village Committee Inc.

Work on the Harry Blore Memorial Park, located opposite the Courthouse and Visitors Centre, began in July 2002. Volunteers have since put in irrigation trenches, planted indigenous trees, shrubs and ground cover, built a children's play area, and installed outdoor tables and seating. Recently, a volunteer group re-laid irrigation to some 400 trees. The Park has won a regional environment award.

A heritage walking trail of the old mining town was completed and a trail guide published in November 2002. Eight significant locations around Milparinka were selected and marked with identification stands.

A perimeter fence was constructed around the local cemetery.

Public toilet facilities were urgently needed in Milparinka. These have been built and the surrounding area planted with trees.

How the Towns and Villages Futures Program has helped

The NSW Government's Towns and Villages Futures Program has given the Milparinka community the capacity to develop plans and ideas for its future and then take ownership of those plans. Initial assistance included facilitation of community planning workshops to develop a community plan and tourism plan.

Funding has been provided toward a number of projects targeted at attracting more visitors including the Once a Jolly Swagman Festival and brochures. Further funding supported the employment costs of a project (tourism) officer. The Department of State and Regional Development (DSRD) has also provided ongoing advice and support.

Ruth Sandow, the Chair of the Heritage and Tourism Association, says that without the assistance that has been received 'Milparinka may well have remained just another dusty reminder of the region's past.'

Ongoing activities

The work of the Milparinka Heritage and Tourism Association is ongoing. Almost every person within the community has been involved in voluntary activities in Milparinka over the past year, despite the difficulties inflicted by the increasing drought.

The Association's efforts have been recognised publicly. In 2004, Milparinka was a finalist in the NSW Community of the Year Award, and winner of the DSRD-sponsored Community Enterprise Award for Events and Tourism for communities with fewer than 2,500 people.

Marketing Milparinka as a day long tourist destination continues to be a priority and the Association has been able to contribute to advertising the town in a wide range of lower cost publications, and on relevant websites, although the cost of regional level marketing remains an issue. The main difficulty is trying to match financial needs with available funds. The Association has found that one of the best ways to maximise promotion is to combine with other small communities to create a collectively viable tourist destination.

Future projects under consideration include a major environmental cleanup of the community and the provision of fire places along the creek for campers.

Contacts

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Community name: Milparinka
Location: 300 kilometres north of Broken Hill in 'Corner Country' outback NSW
LGA: Unincorporated area
Region: Far West
Population: 12 in the village, 50 or so in the surrounding district
Main Industries: Kangaroo meat processing, tourism, agriculture