



## Main Street/Small Towns Program

### Gilgandra – success story

#### Challenges and opportunities

Gilgandra has plenty of affordable, fully serviced residential and industrial land available for development. Its location at the junction of three major highways, including the main Melbourne–Brisbane link, provides excellent access.

Prior to 2000 Gilgandra was experiencing a decline in both economic activity and population. There was growing pessimism and no coherent sense of how to improve the situation.

Given that the local economy is 50–60 per cent focused on agriculture, the impact of the drought was significant. Many businesses were employing fewer staff and people unable to find work were leaving town. As a result Gilgandra's population had gradually declined over the previous few census periods and some businesses were forced to close.

There was no formal strategy to maximise the benefits of highway traffic to the local tourism and retail industries, or any plan relating to Gilgandra's economic development.

#### A program for change

In September 2000 the Gilgandra Shire Council (GSC) applied for a grant through the NSW Government's Main Street/Small Towns Program to support the appointment of a Promotions and Economic Development Officer (PEDO). Funding was provided to partially fund the position for two years, the GSC matched the funding and a PEDO was engaged. Since 2002 the position has been fully funded by the GSC.

In 2001 the GSC was offered assistance under the Townlife Development Program (TDP) to develop a community strategic plan for Tooraweenah and implement projects identified in the plan.

#### Goals

The goal of Gilgandra's Promotions and Economic Development Committee (PEDC) was to make Gilgandra 'a place where things happen'. The committee sought to:

- raise Gilgandra's profile
- stop the population decline
- diversify the economic base
- attract new investment and business

- take greater advantage of Gilgandra's position on a main highway
- encourage local residents to continue living in the Shire by 'selling Gilgandra to Gilgandra'.

#### Projects

In 2002, with the support of the PEDO, the PEDC completed a 12 month community strategic plan, which has since been updated annually. The selection of projects has been determined by the results of a Business Retention and Expansion survey.

Initiatives to benefit Gilgandra Shire residents have included:

- regular community events and celebrations including Australia Day, the Coo-ee Festival, Senior Citizens Week and Community Picnic in the Park, which have attracted greater participation each year
- development of an information pack for new residents.

Initiatives to support existing local businesses have included:

- networking and training workshops
- a local Business Awards scheme, to which entries doubled in 2004
- securing of various community grants, such as \$700,000 from the NSW Government (matched by the GSC) to upgrade a key local bridge.

Initiatives to attract investment and new business have included:

- development of an investment portfolio for Gilgandra
- maintenance of local statistics for answering business enquiries.

The GSC began collaborating with the neighbouring Coonamble and Coonabarabran Shire Councils on both tourism and economic development issues. At the 2004 Sydney Royal Easter Show the three authorities jointly promoted their area as an affordable, safe and enjoyable place to live.

Positive stories about Gilgandra are sent to local and regional media and regularly published. A new community web site ([www.gilgandra.nsw.gov.au](http://www.gilgandra.nsw.gov.au)) has been developed to provide local businesses, residents, workers and visitors with information, links and free online services.

The following initiatives of the Tooraweenah Village Life Committee during 2002 were part-funded through the Townlife Development Program:

- a garden competition
- murals of rabbit trapping, a significant part of local history
- a tourist brochure for Tooraweenah that was distributed to visitor information centres in neighbouring regions
- a walking trail brochure showing historic buildings and sites.

### How the Main Street/Small Towns Program has helped

Funding received by the GSC through the Main Street/Small Towns Program has helped the Gilgandra community initiate a highly successful ongoing program of positive change. By supporting the initial appointment of the PEDO and the conducting of a Business Retention and Expansion survey, the funding began a process which has now gained its own momentum.

The development of a strategic plan has provided Gilgandra with a clear direction and is enabling a systematic, outcomes-focused approach to economic development in the Gilgandra Shire.

The community web site, which receives an average of 2,500 hits a month, has raised Gilgandra's public profile and the morale of local residents and business people. Community events have boosted local pride, cohesion and morale among residents and business people. Gilgandra has become more attractive to locals and tourists alike. There has also been a marked improvement in local and visitor perceptions of Tooraweenah.

Community confidence in the future of Gilgandra is growing. Some existing businesses have been taken over by local residents aged 25–45, and locals have also opened new retail and speciality service businesses. Many local people have upgraded to new or larger houses, and this has freed up residential properties at the lower end of the market for purchase by local first

home buyers and local and outside investors. During 2003/2004, property worth \$40 million was transferred in the Shire and the construction of 16 new houses was begun or completed. Gilgandra was well equipped to deal with this development.

There is a new sense of optimism about Gilgandra. As an elderly resident remarked to the PEDO, 'Gilgandra is a positive place to be and can hold its own. It's got more happening than other towns.' Such a comment was unimaginable before 2000.

### Ongoing activities

Supported by the PEDO, Gilgandra's PEDC is:

- maintaining a focus on economic and community development, and particularly on attracting investment and growing local business
- regularly reviewing the strategic plan and monitoring progress
- creating a long-term vision of Gilgandra's future, so a longer term strategic plan can be developed
- strengthening and extending cooperative relationships with the Coonamble and Warrumbungle (incorporating Coonabarabran) Shire Councils
- conducting a community survey of the web site, to determine its future direction and increase community involvement.

### Contacts

#### Randall Medd

Economic Development Officer  
Gilgandra Shire Council  
Tel: 02 6847 0793

#### Alvaro Marques

Community Economic Development Manager  
Western Regions  
NSW Department of State and Regional Development  
PO Box 1620  
Orange NSW 2800  
Tel: 02 6360 8419  
Fax: 02 6361 2400  
Mob: 0428 856 891  
Email: [alvaro.marques@busines.nsw.gov.au](mailto:alvaro.marques@busines.nsw.gov.au)



**Community name:** Gilgandra Shire

**Area:** 4436 km<sup>2</sup>

**Location:** At the junction of the Newell, Oxley and Castlereagh Highways, 65 km north of Dubbo, in NSW's Central West

**Region:** Orana

**Population:** 5,000

**Main industries:** Agriculture and support industries