

# Community Connect

GDF SUEZ



GDF SUEZ AUSTRALIAN ENERGY - OCTOBER 2015

## Life lessons in the outback

“Probably the biggest achievement of my life,” said Bryan.

“The level of growth, development and sense of personal accomplishment... as a direct result of their involvement in the Operation Flinders program far exceeds what is achievable in the classroom environment over the same period of time,” was one counsellor’s view.

“I have witnessed exceptionally unforeseen pride from our young boys, for their exhausting yet persistent trek,” was the view of Victoria Police Youth Resource Officer Jeni Bennett.

These are just some of the examples of how Operation Flinders is helping young at-risk people turn their lives around and find a new direction in life.

A group of nine Latrobe Valley youths recently completed an eight-day, 100 kilometre Operation Flinders trek - an integral component of a world-leading program designed to develop participants’ self-esteem, leadership, motivation, teamwork and responsibility.

Inside are some of their stories.



Operations Flinders participants took some valuable life lessons from a recent hike through the rugged Flinders Ranges.

# Isabella's story

## In early 2014, I was picked to take part in a program called Operation Flinders. I didn't know how to feel about it...



... and I felt quite frightened knowing that in a few weeks I would be leaving to go out into the Flinders Ranges for eight days.

I was one of a small group of troubled teenage girls to take this wilderness journey. Over the eight days I grew, it opened my eyes and made me realise so much about myself that I didn't know. I had two wonderful teachers from my school (also known as counsellors) and two amazing leaders from Operation Flinders. They all helped us girls grow so much within those eight days.

I found it challenging and painful, eight whole days of walking around the Flinders Ranges, carrying a backpack with all my clothes, water, sleeping gear and food for lunch each day. We went to different camp sites each night, cooked dinner, collected more food and water, slept there or sometimes we went on a night walk and walked until we couldn't anymore.

I pushed through the shoulder pain and blisters and I got through it. It was very much a struggle, not just for me, but for everyone that has ever taken part in Operation Flinders. However, it's worth the struggles that you face because most kids come out a better person with a different perspective on life. Well, that's what happened to me.

At the end of my experience, I was asked to come back as a Peer Group Mentor (PGM).

Since my first adventure, I have partaken in many training weekends. I went through enough training

sessions for the organisers to ask me to go on a walk as a PGM.

In September 2014, I went on my first trip as a PGM and since then I have had so many opportunities in life that I would have never have been given. I continually attend the training weekends (when I can), I quite enjoy them, making new friends is always great. Operation Flinders gives you the chance to make so many new friends and sometimes reconnect with old ones.

Becoming a PGM is a great thing to achieve. Your leaders have noticed and noted leadership skills in you that you might not have known you had, being told that you are great gives you such a burst of happiness and you thrive on it.

I love being a PGM because I meet new people every walk, some are beautiful people that just have a few troubles in life and some have many different problems and need guidance.

Sometimes the misguided teams are the ones that shine out the most. The kids struggle, actually we all do. Every group is different because everyone is different, you can't really have expectations on the group because you don't know what they are like at first and how much they can physically and mentally tolerate.

Kids doing Operation Flinders normally don't know what to expect. It's just like throwing them in the deep end of a swimming pool without them actually knowing how to swim properly, so you kind of

**GDF SUEZ Australian Energy has been supporting Operation Flinders in South Australia for a number of years, including three teams' participation in the program in 2015.**

**September 2015 saw the first Latrobe Valley team travel to the Flinders Ranges, supported by the 'Operation Flinders Latrobe Valley Partnership', a co-operation between GDFSAE, the Rotary Clubs of Moe, Morwell, Hazelwood, Traralgon and Traralgon Central, The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and Victoria Police. Two more teams are set to make the trek in 2016.**

have to teach them to swim as they are trying to stay afloat.

Once they have conquered the basics they can try freestyle.

Through Operation Flinders I have learnt that not only the participants struggle but the leaders do too. We have some kids that love being out there but are afraid to go home for their safety. It's not every day you have someone burst into tears in front of you because her dad beats her and her brother. As I said before and I will repeat over and over again, we are there to help. These kids are troubled, going down the wrong pathway in life and need our help or they are at risk of being abused so much they don't know if it's okay or not, don't know how to feel.

We will always be here to help, that's what we are there for. Most PGMs have been through it all or worse and that is why we are there supporting the participants along the way.

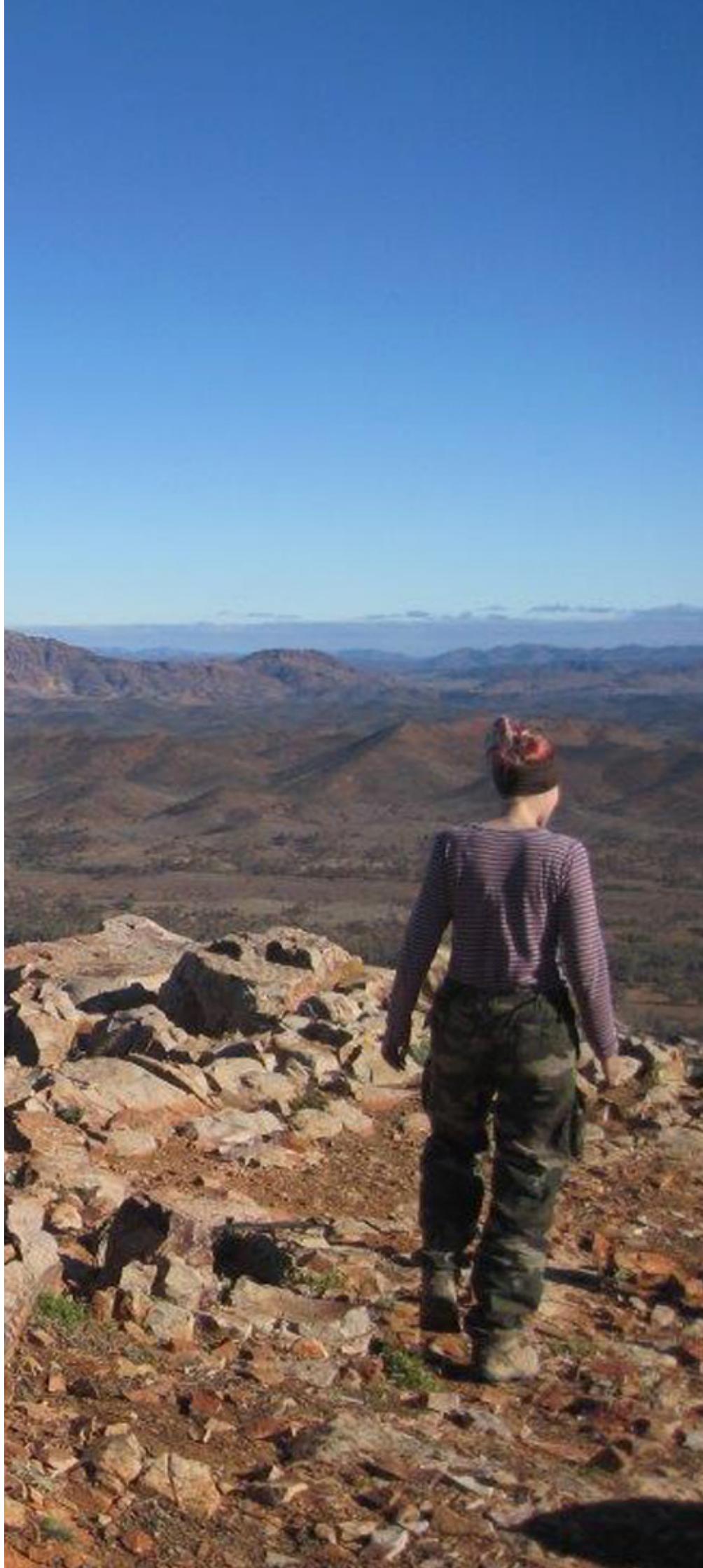
A famous quote that I admire is - "Remember you are a different person now than before, you are wiser and stronger from the trials that you have been through."

Everyone has it rough at some stage in their lives but people move on, some people just need a little help.

Don't give up on the seed that hasn't sprouted yet, it just wasn't ready to grow. Maybe it didn't have enough water at the time but in the blink of an eye, that seed can be a tree.

That tree is me.

**Isabella Spencer**





*Luke Haustorfer (left) and Dale Banks from Latrobe Valley Flexible Learning Option take in their surrounds during the trek.*



*Leading Senior Constable Jeni Bennett (front) during an abseiling exercise.*

# Challenging, yet rewarding



## Luke Haustorfer provides a counsellor's perspective on the positive experience of the first group of Latrobe Valley teens to participate in Operation Flinders.

### BRYAN

"It was really hard, I didn't think I'd make it but I did. I feel like I've achieved something big. Probably the biggest achievement of my life."

### JAKE

"At times I thought I was going to die but I did it! I'm so proud of myself."

### CODY

"I reckon there were three main things to learn from the trip:

- None of us had ever really completed anything
- You can't just run off from that place and
- We did it as a team.

We're all really proud of ourselves."

As we rolled into Yankaninna Station in our air-conditioned minivans, it became apparent that the arduous 16-hour drive was the easy part of the trip. The next nine days weren't going to be merely a stroll in the park.

We had researched the weather, looked at maps and watched clips of previous operations, but nothing can fully prepare you for how hot, dry, remote and unforgiving the northern Flinders Ranges are.

Operations Flinders staff often talk about the stages of group development (forming, storming, norming and performing) and it quickly became apparent that in the same amount of time that it took us to remove ourselves from the comfort of our vans, our team from the Latrobe Valley Flexible Learning Option (FLO) campus had also moved from the forming stage to storming stage.

Tantrums were had about the lack of phone reception, there were hissy fits about the flies and there was quite a bit of cussing about the backpacks and their perceived lack of space.

Towards the end of day two, the students started to progress from the storming to the norming stage. Slowly, they realised that there were no 'outs', that tantrums were futile and that disrespectful behaviour would only result in extra kilometres being added to the day's hike.

The real satisfaction came in the latter stages of the hike as the students started to perform as a group and work together. Some were offering to take extra weight in their packs to assist others, there were lots of encouraging and motivating words, everyone did their chores with minimal support and positive relationships between the leaders and participants began to flourish.

While it had taken us a while to get there, we had finally hiked our way through the wilderness to the performing stage. And it was a huge relief!

As a teacher who has worked with many of the FLO participants for more than 12 months, it was extremely rewarding to witness the growth and development many displayed over a relatively short period. The growth, development and sense of personal accomplishment that participants experienced as a direct result of their involvement in the program far exceeds what is achievable in the classroom environment over the same period of time.

Hopefully, these gains aren't just short term. In years to come, we want these participants to draw on the experience of Operation Flinders to help them overcome any of life's obstacles they may encounter.

# Hopefuls given the Power

Ask pretty much any young boy what they would like to be when they grow up and they'll say "AFL footballer".

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Since the TAC competition's inception, 97 players have been drafted to the AFL from Gippsland Power. The club hopes to this year pass 100.

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And for a number of current Gippsland Power players, that dream is one step closer following their selection for the NAB AFL Draft Combine.

The Gippsland Power football factory is likely to deliver at least four draftees in this year's national draft as the club continues to be a strong breeding ground for future household names of the game.

Established in 1993, Gippsland Power Football Club competes in the TAC Cup, an Under 18 Australian Rules football representative competition held in Victoria. The competition has proven to be one of the primary sources of recruitment for AFL clubs.

For Gippsland Power players, TAC Cup representation is much more than learning about football.

Coach Leigh Brown has gone the full circle, having been a graduate of the TAC program, selected at pick five in the 1999 draft and playing 248 AFL games, before turning his hand to coaching at the end of his career.

Leigh says that while many may think the club's sole focus is on preparing for match day, the club plays an integral role in developing young leaders of the future.

"The program is more than developing players with the hope of them achieving their ultimate goal of being drafted," Leigh says.

"Our players need to balance school, work - whether it be first jobs or apprenticeships, club football, logging hours to gain their driver's licence, family and social life. The club plays an integral role and is responsible for ensuring they have the right balance to enable them to come out the other side a better person, empowering them to become positive role models in the community and, for a lucky few, an AFL footballer.

"The TAC Cup is about producing champions on and off the field and has a key focus on personal development and leadership. Local sporting clubs in country regions, whether it be football, netball or soccer, play a fundamental role in education and developing their players, creating a positive impact on their future.

"This year, players in the Gippsland Power program have participated in educational workshops covering a range of issues and challenges faced in today's society. This allowed them to increase their understanding of gambling, mental health, respect and responsibility, drugs in sport, leadership, workshops for preparing for life after school, health and wellbeing, responsible driving and social media."

**GDF SUEZ Australian Energy recently strengthened its partnership with Gippsland Power, supporting a promotional campaign aimed at increasing participation in the Gippsland Power TAC Youth Girls Academy.**

## EMERGING TALENTS



### Nash Holmes

One draft hopeful and invitee to the NAB AFL Draft Combine is Sale's Nash Holmes. The Year 12 Catholic College Sale student juggles the rigours of text books, exams, training and football as he looks to fulfil his childhood dream.

"It has been my dream to play AFL," Nash says. "Every day I think about playing. I would just love to do it as a career."

His credentials have been long known. A talented junior who has represented Vic Country in several underage carnivals, the dogged

competitor was recently named in the TAC Cup Team of the Year and is on the radar of several AFL clubs.

Nash credits his involvement with Gippsland Power in further developing himself as a player and person.

"The system at Power has helped me heaps," he says. "We come here twice a week where we train, get feedback from our coach Leigh (Brown) who provides us with constant feedback on how you play."



### Ben Ainsworth

An underage member of the Power team, Morwell's Ben Ainsworth, is one to watch. A fleet-footed forward, Ben will again put in the hard yards over the pre-season as he looks to push for draft selection at the end of season 2016.

A standout performer at this year's National Championship carnival as a member of Victorian Country, Ben kicked five goals in the final match against Western Australia and was named in the NAB AFL Under 18 All Australian team. It wasn't only his performance at the National Championships that brought success, with his season at Power resulting in TAC Cup Team of the Year honours.

Put under the microscope by football talent scouts, recruiters, coaches and even Geelong AFL players who watched him during the National Championship Carnival, Ben said it wasn't until a few years ago that he realised he could possibly make it to the elite level.

"Since Under 10s, I hadn't come to a realisation that this would end up being something. In Under 14s you start to think that you are in with a shot and by Under 15-16s, you know that you are in for a real good shot.

"I'd like to hope that my performances at the National Carnival caught the attention of a few people."



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# Students energised by science

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There's nothing like fire and noise to get kids' attention and that's just what happened at a special presentation on 'Energy' by GDF SUEZ Hazelwood at Kurnai College in Morwell recently.

Mobile Science educator Lee Harrison, who works with GDFSAE generation assets in Victoria and South Australia in teaching students the science around the power industry, captivated his young audience with demonstrations and hands-on activities.

Mr Harrison, supported by GDF

SUEZ Australian Energy's Lauren Carey, explained the science of energy and as part of that process, power generation. It was a snapshot of the program Mobile Science Education runs for students of all ages at Loy Yang B.

Three local primary schools as well as Year 7 Kurnai College students also learnt about water, sustainability and indigenous culture as part of Kids Teaching Kids, a national program.

Event coordinator and Kurnai teacher, Lisa Benn, said the collaborative community effort,

involving a range of local organisations and businesses, created an "enriched learning experience" for the students.

"It's a great opportunity for students to learn leadership skills while learning about our community," she says.

Mr Harrison's presentation included an interactive session and a number of workstations set up with practical activities, all embraced enthusiastically by the students.

"Without the community support, it just wouldn't be the enormous fantastic day that it is," Lisa added.



# Our Partners



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www.fareshare.net.au



**Youth Focus**  
www.youthfocus.com.au



**Interchange Gippsland**  
www.icg.asn.au



**Kaarakin Black Cockatoo Sanctuary**  
www.blackcockatoorecovery.com



**Read the Play Inc.**  
www.readtheplay.org.au



**Balvidis Children's Forest**  
www.baldivis-childrens-forest.com.au



**Operation Flinders**  
www.operationflinders.org.au



**City of Kwinana local school festival day - Freakfest**  
www.livekwinana.com.au



**The Latrobe Regional Gallery**  
www.latroberegionalgallery.com



**Secret Harbour Surf Life Saving Club**  
www.secretharbourslsc.com



**Bass Coast Landcare Environmental Detectives**  
www.landcareonline.com.au



**Tyers Arts Festival**



**Mobile Science Education**  
www.mobilescienceeducation.com.au



**City of Rockingham Castaways Sculpture Innovation Award**



**Life Education Gippsland**  
www.lifeeducation.org.au/page/item/300-gippsland



**North Haven Surf Life Saving Club**



**Gippsland Swimming**  
www.gippslandswimming.org.au

**The Hazelwood Multisport Festival**



**GDF SUEZ Gippsland Power Football Club**  
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**Latrobe Valley Baseball Association**  
www.latrobevalley.baseball.com.au

**Gippsland Primary Schools Sports Camp**

**The Latrobe City Council Children's Traffic School**

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