

*Eden Community Access Centre*

ECAC 25 years Dinner 28<sup>th</sup> June 2025

### **Speech for Eden Community Access Centre's 25-Year Celebration**

Good evening, everyone!

What a privilege it is to stand before you as the Manager of Eden Community Access Centre on this very special night. Tonight, we celebrate 25 years of connection, support, and—let's be honest—occasional chaos in keeping this incredible community moving forward!

Let's take a moment to reflect on 1999—when The Access Centre first opened its doors. Back then, Blockbuster was still a Friday night tradition, dial-up internet tested our patience, and the most advanced piece of tech in many homes was a Tamagotchi - and it usually met an untimely demise. Well done to Clair Whiter and the Eden Foundation for not only launching this enterprise but working hard to keep it evolving and meeting the needs of individuals for so many years.

For 25 Years while lots in our worlds have changed, The Access Centre has remained a constant—growing from a simple community hub into a driver of advocacy, coordination, and support.

We've been here through the big moments. When the fires of 2020 devastated our town, we helped people access shelter, food, insurance support and referral to agencies that could help them out. We even directed the Australian Defence Force for a few weeks to deliver water, reopen properties, clear trees and rebuild bridges.

Then came COVID, and again, The Access Centre stepped up—helping our community navigate new challenges while keeping connection and care at the heart of what we do.

But disaster response isn't all we do—we champion Eden every single day. We've worked more recently to support the ERRA group advocate for improved services, push for the reopening of Nullica Lodge, advocate for improvements to the Barclay St Development, upgrades to the netball courts and of course advocate for a new Multi-Purpose Community Hub & Hall for Eden.

Not to mention the projects and programs we've instigated (such as the multitude of Youth Holidays Programs.... Dance learning to do something whether it be dance, surfboarding, skating or acting and even Disaster preparedness)

We've stood beside local groups, giving them the support they need to progress their projects—HELP Help Eden's Little Penguins, Eden Fitness Trail, Eden Singers, Imagine Eden, Lap It Up Club, ERRA, Bega Showground Land Managers, Bega Valley Gaming, Sculpture Eden, Eden Women's Information Network and Assistance (EDWINA), Wonboyn Ratepayers, Rocky Hall Committee, Eden Sculptures, Clean Curralo, Eden Project Labs, Eden Log Cabin, and many many more.

One of the biggest projects we helped bring to life and auspice was the \$4.5 million Eden Mountain Bike Trails development—an investment in both adventure, community and local economy.

We even supported Cobargo (via a disaster grant) to set up a tool library, community garden and Community Access Centre in their own right.

Meanwhile, our daily work never slows. We are now averaging 300 people each month seeking assistance of some kind. Need help navigating Services Australia for a pension, Jobseeker, or Carer payment? We're here. Renewing passports, applying for jobs, securing visas? We've got you. Uploading, downloading, scanning, printing of family photos to plans for a new home—we're on it. Homelessness support, booking specialist appointments, accommodation or travel, signing JP documents, even assisting with citizenship applications—The Access Centre has the answer to questions people didn't even realize they needed to ask. And if we don't know then we used to ask "Google" ....now we ask AI - Co-pilot, ChatGPT or Gemini.

But beyond all the paperwork, we make time to celebrate! Whether it's morning teas for seniors, cyber security workshops, or marking local events, we believe that true community isn't just about services—it's about people. That reminds me of a lovely local lady by the name of Rae Bingham who one such person. This week Rae has provided the Centre with some beautiful home cooking to celebrate our 25 years—cakes, bickies, Patty Cakes and scones with jam & cream – all treat all our visitors, volunteers, clients & staff. I must say everyone, apart from my waistline has been very very appreciative.

Tonight though, my biggest thanks must go to our volunteers—those who have given their time, their effort, and their unwavering dedication to keeping the Centre going. Special thanks to Maree & Vera who have put this evening together.

And another special shout-out to the Access Centre Committee, those extraordinary individuals who go the extra mile to make sure Eden is thriving. Signing up for a Committee is never glamorous—it's often a thankless task—but these people do it because they care. Since my involvement with the Access Centre, I have had the privilege of working with a proactive and deeply supportive group who always have Eden's best interests at heart. And let's not forget—they also pay my wages! Peter Skelton, Julian Webb, Vera Clark, Maree O'Neill, Christine Freudenstein, Bev Walker & Joy Robin head up our current committee and I thank you for your support and inspiration. I also give thanks to all those who have previously served on the Access Centre Board of Management.

Without the Committee steering this ship we would not have been able to deliver some of the local projects we are so proud of. Some of our current projects include:

The Bega Valley L2P Driver Mentor Program – Thanks to Mel Page for stepping into this role just this month – baptism of fire!!

The Eden Tech Centre – Marcus Clark for your patience with the time it takes for me to understand an IT issue

CODA – Deb Richardson

Spontaneous Volunteer Project – Kuh Cruse

Firewise Program – Shelley Caban

These projects wouldn't be possible without the support of our Partners – Mumbulla (Mick Pryke), Eden LALC, Bendigo Bank, Rotary & Lions, FRRR, Clubs Grants, South East Arts, NSW Government (Michael Holland), Good things foundation, Department of Home Affairs, Essential Energy, Foundation for National Parks & Wildlife, Harcourts Foundation, NSW Reconstruction & NCOSS, Hamer Sprout Foundation, Community Underwriting

Thank you all

So, let's raise a glass (or a fork, if you are still eating) to 25 years of service, support, and resilience. To the volunteers, the Committee, and everyone who makes ECAC what it is—thank you. And to the next 25 years—may they be just as meaningful, just as impactful, and just as full of moments where we now wonder..... “Am I being scammed?”

CHEERS & thank you, and enjoy the evening!

Carina Severs