

25th Anniversary of Eden Community Access Centre dinner
6pm 28th June 2025 at Great Southern Hotel

MC – Peter Skelton

Apologies

Introduce Sid Donaldson - How Eden Community Access Centre (ECAC Inc.) started

Introduce Clare Whiter - Reflections from the first manager

Introduce Carina Severs - Current manager

Thanks to Great Southern Staff, volunteers – especially organisers and researchers of this event, Rae Bingham for the celebration cake,

When I went to save this file on my computer I save any Access Centre files in the Business folder. My first contact with the AC was as a sessional tutor just after it started. The AC had money to pay tutors at that stage. I don't know how that grant or business model worked. That was in the days when many people were wondering what all this computing stuff was about or forced to take them up for their work.

I used to start off by explaining what's in the box and briefly how they work. It gave people a picture of what was going on but also gave them enough information to intelligently use them. For instance – what does *saving* a file do.

My own use of computers was after realising how efficiently it made many of my jobs. I was initially amazed that you could go back and edit, move paragraphs. It changed the way I write, not just the way I live.

Watching a movie of a legal practice in the 1960s- to change one misused word, with many instances in a 250 page document meant retyping the whole document.

My classes would learn that even in the short time, 10 years, that I had been using computers that speed and storage had reduced in cost by 1,000 times. What else in our society has dropped in price by a factor of 1,000 each decade? My first Mb of RAM cost \$70 (in late 1990's values) it now costs 12c on eBay which didn't even exist then. Storage and computing speed is now so cheap "Why don't we just store everything?".

Let's keep pictures of everything we do. The government records and stores each passing number plate. Our purchases, our documented views, the time we scroll or pause on an object. All recorded to build up a profile that is a saleable item. *If you are not paying for the product, you are the product.*

The AC has been at the forefront of assisting people to enter the digital age at whatever level they need. Let's admit it, it is changing all the time. Governments made decisions to fund this work of getting the population ready.

Anyone remember the sound on your phone when you used dial-up? The internet monopolised the phone line, you couldn't then use the phone for incoming or outgoing calls.

Broadband, which has gone through iterations of speed and technology, was a gamechanger for businesses and homes. The AC was instrumental in researching the best methods of making broadband accessible for Eden and its hinterland's population. More education was again needed.

Then we went through the same process when phones could be used in conjunction with the internet. In 1931 the Dick Tracy comics had a watch radio. 100 years later we have time, internet, phone book, body monitor all on our wrists. I don't know but probably altimeter, thermometer, depth gauge for skindiving and the ability to read the original 1931 comic on just one type of wearable.

The dark side, and there always is for any type of technology, the AC has been at the forefront of raising awareness of the digital traps as others will use your ignorance and laziness, or let's just say *naivety*, to steal or cheat you out of your possessions, your money, your relationships and even your identity.

So far, I have concentrated on the computer side of the work of the Access Centre. Now more of a community hub. The AC needed to change as government priorities changed. Almost all of the old technology centres have faded into deep memory and are not celebrating their 25th. Many factors have come together to enabling our, or should I say your, organisation's survival -

- The work of volunteers. They would not show up if they didn't believe in the worth of each project, interaction. Some of these are life-changing or even life-saving.
- Branching out into housing assistance, referrals to other agencies (some of them co-hosted onsite)
- The support of Bega Valley Shire Council which provides the site, maintenance (no comments from the managers), electricity – all at cheap to reasonable rates.

- The support of the community which has come to trust the AC as an entity that can speak for the community or can help them rally around local issues. That currently ranges from stormwater and sewerage dump points to housing and business support.
- The skills of the management committee. I joined so long ago that neither I nor anyone here can remember when. I have continued to be amazed at the capabilities and attitudes of the members of the board. I come home each meeting and comment to Pam how much in awe I am.
- The disaster that faced our community and then came in early 2020 proved that the AC was really needed. The staff stepped up to support and connect in extreme circumstances. Funding followed from Bushfire funds that expanded the organisation, financially nearly 10-fold. All to support immediately, medium-term and long-term the needs of community that we almost couldn't have even predicted. I think our resilience was tested and proven and now our metal is even stronger.
- The driver's seat is taken by the managers. A credit to them and the organisation that we have only had 2, Clare and Carina. So many cups of hot coffee juggled in the air at the same time. Keeping volunteers gainfully employed and happy, dealing with business, funding bodies, other agencies, managing a budget – all without spilling a drop.

In looking for final comments I couldn't go past Carina's phrasing in The Eden Connection (long may it live! and I recommend the June issue on our website for further historical insights)

As we reflect on 25 years of progress, we also look ahead to new possibilities. Whether through expanded community programs, stronger collaborations, or enhanced spaces like Snug Cove, our mission remains clear—to foster connection, empower individuals, and contribute to a resilient, vibrant Eden.

Thank you for being part of this journey. Here's to the next 25 years of growth and impact!

- Peter Skelton,
Chairperson of the Board of Management of Eden Community Access Centre Inc.