

Inaugural report A look inside our city

Reports: **BRENDAN GULLIFER**

WHERE are we? Where are we headed?

And how do we shape up as we head into the second decade of the 21st century?

Welcome to the first *Vital Signs* report for Ballarat.

Prepared by The Ballarat Foundation and based on a highly successful Toronto project, this Australian-first provides a snapshot of the positive and negative trends in our city.

Compiled from current statistics and other publicly available studies, *Vital Signs Ballarat* will deepen our understanding of who we are.

And hopefully, as it's undertaken regularly, it will provide a road map for our leaders to build a stronger city and region.

So what picture emerges of our city and its people?

Most who live in this region report a high quality of life. We have good infrastructure, health and education services.

We enjoy high-quality sports and recreation facilities as well as a variety of cultural pursuits.

Many of us own our own homes. Our children who complete year 12 enthusiastically embrace university.

And our city is relatively economically stable.

But there are areas which require further attention.

The gap between our rich and poor continues to widen.

Single parent families struggle against rising costs of living.

Only 70 per cent of students in our government schools complete year 12, and unemployment here is consistently higher than it is for other regions and the state overall.

While Ballarat is generally a safe place to live, certain types of crime are more prevalent here.

These include assault and property damage.

But, overall, this is a great place to live. Most of us lead quiet lives of fulfilment

AT A GLANCE

BALLARAT is a city of movers, if not shakers. In the 2006 census, 17 per cent of respondents said they have moved house in the previous 12 months. A massive 44 per cent said they had moved within the previous five years.

OUR population increased 7.2 per cent to 92,015 in the five years to 2008. And in 2009, this figure topped 94,000. In percentage terms, we're growing faster than Bendigo and Geelong - and the state as a whole.

MANY of us are employed in health and social assistance (13 per cent), followed by retail (11), manufacturing (10), education (10) and construction (8).

OUR average taxable income in 2007 was \$43,661, just topping Bendigo but less than Geelong.

OUR health is on a par with the rest of the state. Incidence of heart disease, stroke, cancer, osteoporosis and diabetes are about the same in the Central Highlands region as they are elsewhere in Victoria.

UNEMPLOYMENT rates here in the period 2005-2009 remained above Geelong and Victoria as a whole.

BALLARAT is generally a safe place to live, but crime against property is on the increase.

Most who live in this region report a high quality of life.

and enjoyment here, in one of the country's most beautiful regions.

Challenges include economic growth through business attraction and job creation, maintaining and building infrastructure, and putting in place more programs to help those in need.



HOME: Immigrant advocate Shiree Pilkington, Nyanchar Deng, and refugee health nurse Karen Werner.

Welcome to the new age

IMAGINE our city in 20 years.

Sturt Street bustles with a mix of Australian and ethnic cafes and restaurants.

There's a lunch bar serving Sudanese food. Next door is a cafe dishing up good coffee and Persian cakes and, down the road a bit, a Mozambican restaurant.

In Bridge Mall, a hole-in-the-wall bar nightly features a four-piece group playing traditional music from Ghana. And the Harmony Fest has grown to become an annual celebration to rival the Mardi Gras in Sydney or the World Music Arts and Dance Festival in Adelaide.

Welcome to new-age Ballarat in the 21st century.

Black faces and bright costumes are a common sight. Day visitors come from Melbourne, Geelong and Bendigo to marvel at our melting pot.

Sound far-fetched? Possibly - and possibly not.

As *Vital Signs* reports, the 2006 census showed more than eight per cent of Ballarat's population is from overseas. Rough

When I was in Sudan I lose many things in my heart. Now it's a way to build understanding.

figures from the City of Ballarat - and the council doesn't keep formal statistics on this - suggest more than 500 African migrants now call Ballarat home.

The largest number are from Sudan with about 250. Most are refugees, as are the 80 or so residents from Togo. Most of the South Africans, numbering more than a 100, arrived here as skilled migrants.

The City of Ballarat has operated a skilled migration project since 2005 to attract and retain new migrants to the city. Since September, 2009, 42 new residents from overseas have decided to call Ballarat home under this scheme. The largest group, 16, is from India.

But it is undoubtedly our refugee and asylum seeker new arrivals who have risked most to get here and they bring with them stories of survival and loss.

Immigrant advocate at the Ballarat Community

Health Centre Shiree Pilkington says many refugee families arrive in Ballarat after 10 years in refugee camps - or even longer.

So, when they eventually settle here, they face enormous challenges of language and adjustment.

But they also bring a survivor's approach to re-establishment.

Nyanchar Deng giggles when asked how old her husband is. (She thinks he's 31.)

For many Sudanese refugees, age is one more intangible in a life of uncertainty. Birth certificates aren't a priority in a refugee camp and children are often orphans.

Nyanchar, 29, was in a refugee camp in Ethiopia from seven months through to 14 years. She met her future husband there.

Life was tough and dangerous. There were frequent fights among camp inmates and militia. Food and water were scarce. For many

refugees, the hardest part was not knowing when it would end. Nyanchar's aunt, for instance, has been in a refugee camp for 50 years.

When Nyanchar and her husband arrived in Australia in 2004, they had two children. Now they have four, aged 10, seven, five and two. They moved to Ballarat in 2005.

Now, with a small group of friends, Nyanchar has started a unique business called Share Africa.

Share Africa consists of four Sudanese women who provide African culture workshops, cooking classes, beading and dancing for schools and community events.

So far the group, which has its own website www.share-africa.com, has appeared at a number of regional schools as well as run well-attended cooking classes.

Nyanchar says it's a way to give back to her new country and community while raising funds for those left behind in Sudan and in Ethiopian camps.

"When I was in Sudan I lose many things in my heart," she says.

"Now it's a way to build understanding."

ABOUT THE REPORT

In 2001, the Toronto Community Foundation began monitoring the health of its city and sharing the results through Toronto's *Vital Signs*.

It has continued on an annual basis to this day and serves as an annual check-up on the vitality of Toronto.

It provides a snapshot of the positive and negative trends in areas considered to be of importance to the city of Toronto's quality of life.

The Ballarat Foundation

has adopted the conceptual framework of *Vital Signs* for Ballarat and its region.

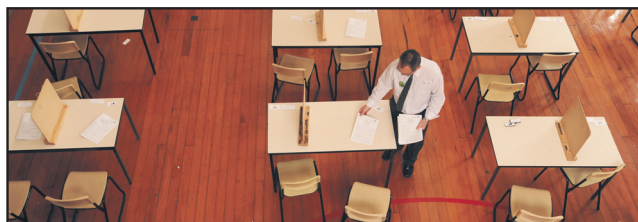
The foundation considers that an annual evaluation of Ballarat's *Vital Signs* will provide the city and the region with signposts on the quality of life.

Equally importantly, *Vital Signs* will provide the community, local and state governments with a clear view of what we should celebrate, and where, as a community, we should be directing our energies.

BALLARAT AND ITS REGION

The publicly available data accessed for *Vital Signs* relates to a number of defined geographical areas such as local government areas, statistical regions, postcodes and, in the health area, Primary Care Partnership Levels.

The Primary Care Partnership Level used was the Central Highlands. Note that data was not always available at the local government area level and may only have been available for the larger regional areas.



School retention rates in the Grampians region are progressively decreasing.

THE NEED

Ballarat's and its region's *Vital Signs* are compiled from current statistics and other publicly available studies. The report draws heavily on data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics and from federal, state and local government departments.

The study examines a number of issue areas, many of which are interconnected, and are considered to be central to the well-being of our city and region. The foundation trusts that this study



Now! For the Future

deepens our understanding and will be a valuable tool for residents, leaders and elected officials who develop the appropriate visions and accompanying plans required to build a stronger city and region.

Pet project shows the strength of economy

YOU can never judge a book by its cover when it comes to pet owners, says David Young.

"They can pull up in a Mercedes and buy the cheapest bag of dog food or they can pull up in an old Datsun and buy the most expensive, and everything else to go with it," says the general manager of PETstock.

The Ballarat-based company is now one of Australia's fastest-growing franchises.

From humble beginnings as the

Ballarat Produce and Merchandise store in the 1990s, the group now has 65 company-owned and franchised stores across the country.

PETstock plans to boost this number to 100 by June 2013. Revenue this year will be just over \$120 million, with business magazine *BRW* heralding the company as a franchise to watch.

Brothers David and Shane Young, originally from St Arnaud, are the powerhouses behind the group.

Thirty per cent of stores are owned by the company. Many of the key executives own stores themselves and have shares within PETstock.

"We've got a great group of people," David, 32, says.

"We've got a family in Adelaide who just opened their fifth store prior to Christmas. And we've got a couple of other multi-franchisees.

"From our perspective, it's all about the people."

Father Barry works in the company

and owns a PETstock franchise in regional Victoria with a friend. Mother Joan works at the Latrobe Street store.

Back in 1991, Shane, now CEO, bought Ballarat Produce and Merchandise. A few years later, he bought a similar store in Horsham.

Twelve of their customers later agreed to re-brand under the PETstock name, with the company's first greenfields site opening in Hoppers Crossing in 2003.

Clearly the growth in the designer pet accessory demographic is set to continue.

The gay market, people choosing to live together before getting married with the surrogate dog or cat "child", and an ageing population all mean the pet feed and accessory business will remain strong.

"One thing we know is that people treat their pets as well as themselves, if not better," David says.

Community safety

Crime stats heading in the right direction

BALLARAT police have welcomed the first *Vital Signs Ballarat* report and say their own subsequent statistics show they are winning the war against crime.

Divisional Superintendent Andrew Allen says the two areas of crime identified in the *Vital Signs* report – property and assault – have reduced in the past two quarters.

Superintendent Allen says the property crime rate is down 18 per cent and crimes against the person by five per cent, since the *Vital Signs*' figures for last year.

"While *Vital Signs* gives a fair snapshot, since that time there's been some significant improvements," he says.

"There's always work to do, but there's some good signs."

Superintendent Allen says there are about 270 police stationed across his division, with 135 in the police service area of Ballarat, which incorporates the Pyrenees local government area.

Police numbers will be increased by about 30 this year.

Superintendent Allen says an increasing number of "historical" sex assaults comprised current statistics.

"We're seeing more archival reports of sex assaults as there is more therapy and more discussion in families," he says.

Superintendent Allen says a key priority for police was family violence, which was trending upwards.

He looks forward to future *Vital Signs* reports



WINNING THE WAR: Superintendent Andrew Allen says property crime and assaults are reducing in Ballarat.

on Ballarat, which would allow for comparison and track trends.

IT'S YOUR LIFE

Income: Ballarat compares favourably with Bendigo and Geelong with Ballarat residents' taxable income at \$43,661 in 2007. Bendigo residents had a taxable income of \$42,221 and Geelong \$46,736 for the same period. The average taxable income for Victorians for 2007 stood at \$50,818. More than 11 per cent (11.03 per cent in 2009) of the Ballarat population received the age pension. More than

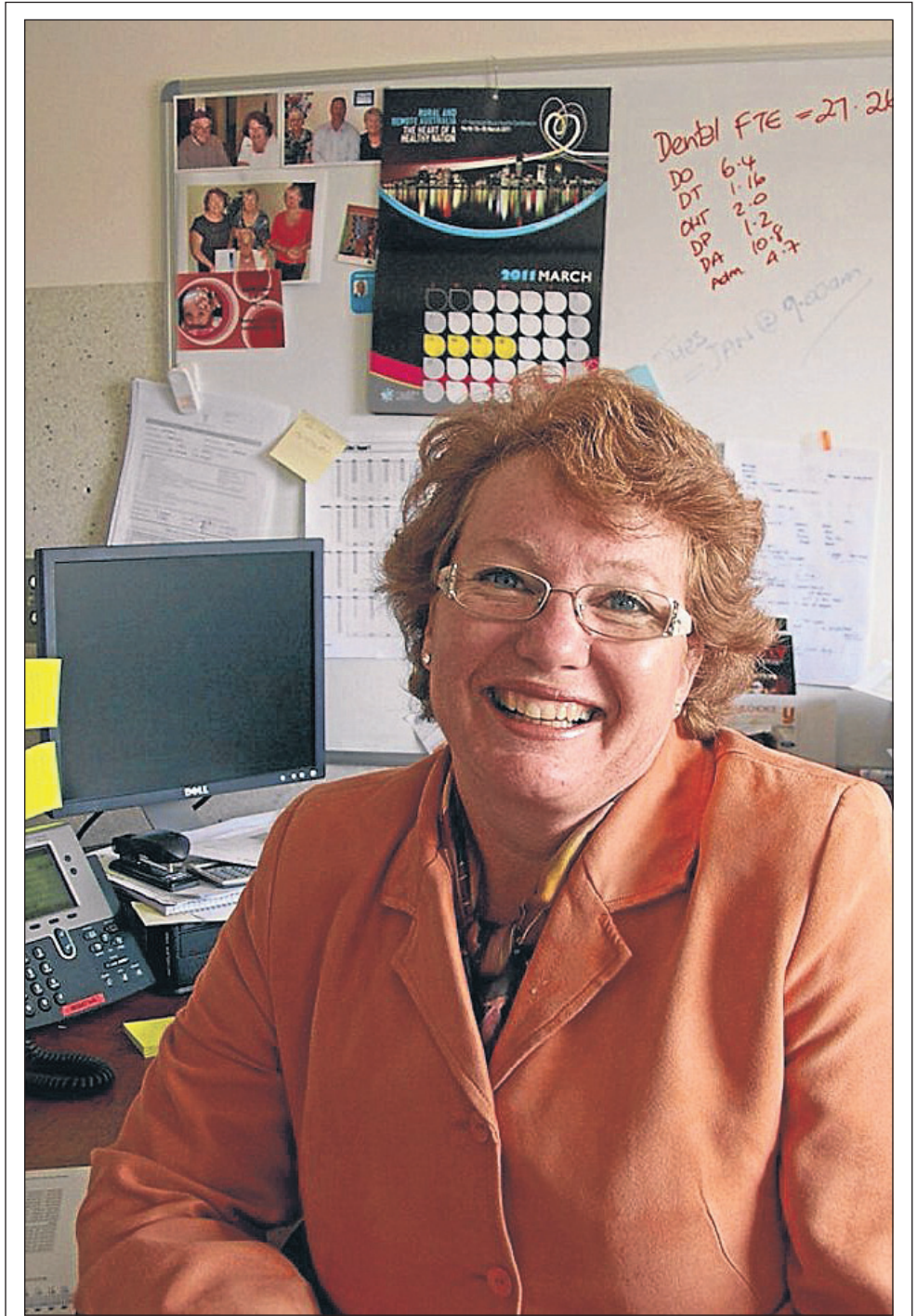
five per cent (5.05 per cent in 2009) of the Ballarat population received a disability pension.

Education: The retention rate in the Grampians region has progressively decreased from 75.1 per cent in 1999 to 70.8 per cent in 2009.

Life expectancy: The life expectancy of females exceeds that of males irrespective of the region. For the Central Goldfields, the

female lifespan is 82 years whereas the male lifespan is 78 years.

At home: For Victoria, about one-third of dwellings are owned outright, about one-third are owned, but subject to a mortgage, and just under one-third being rented. For regional Victoria, there is a marginally higher rate of home ownership (about 71 per cent) than for Victoria. Just on 24 per cent of dwellings are rental properties.



NEW METHODS: BHS population health and strategic planning manager Tracey Wilson.

Working smarter a key in health

IMAGINE calling your dentist for a check-up and being told the wait was 56 months.

Until recently, that was what almost 60,000 local and regional people could expect.

But, in 2008, the public dental service here was taken over by Ballarat Health Services.

And the waiting time has been slashed to 27 months.

The improvements have been driven by Tracey Wilson, BHS manager of population health and strategic planning.

Ms Wilson is a former clinical dental therapist and previously worked at Dental Health Services Victoria as a regional manager.

She brought with her a passion for making public dental care more accessible.

"If your teeth are bad, it's impacting on what you can eat," she says.

"It will often impact on your speech and, in a lot of cases, your ability to get employment."

Ms Wilson says dental care is linked to issues of self esteem and chronic health.

"I'm fairly passionate about making sure people can get to the dental program in a timely fashion," she says.

The public dental system is used by holders of pension and health care cards.

How BHS cut the waiting time is a classic example of an efficient public health administration working smart.

First, it undertook an audit of the public dental waiting list, numbering about 3500, and found at least half the names could be removed because people had moved away or had died, had gained employment or simply couldn't be found.

Procedures for handling patients were streamlined

as additional clinics opened in Sebastopol and Wendouree.

Thirty-five staff now operate 11 dental chairs at three locations, and see up to 12 patients per chair daily.

Saturday sessions are used to conduct an initial quick check of patients to determine what kind of care is needed.

Patients requiring little work are given vouchers to private services.

Those needing more extensive care are booked into the public service.

As with all public dental care, all patients make a financial contribution except those under 18.

Ms Wilson says 60,000 people across this region are eligible for public care so any improvements in the service have a significant impact on the local population.