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VITAL SIGNS

Study Highlights

The Ballarat Foundation and the State of Ballarat and its Region

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Launch Address

By

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Thanks to Noel Trengove, James Coghlan, fellow directors of the Ballarat Foundation and especially Angela Carey, Andrew Eales, Brendan Gullifer and their colleagues from the Courier.

Some background.

We embarked on the Vital Signs project to

- Provide a snapshot of the quality of life in Ballarat and its region.
- Provide an opportunity to compare Ballarat with its comparable cities using Victoria as a whole as the baseline.
- Act as a catalyst for further conversations and actions by the community and its leaders.

As you know Vital Signs is based on an approach taken by the Toronto Community Foundation to assess the quality of life in the Canadian city of Toronto.

The information contained in our Vital Signs is based on publicly available data from industry, and federal, state and local government sources exploring:

the gap between the rich and the poor;

personal and community safety;



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education;
health and wellness;
work;
housing;
the environment;
arts and culture; and
getting around [transport].

And the findings are fascinating, sobering and instructive.

Vital Signs shows that the great majority of people of Ballarat and its region continue to lead a high quality of life, well served by good infrastructure, health and educational services, sporting and recreational facilities and vibrant cultural offerings.

Average taxable income compares favourably with other major regional cities and a majority of couples with children have incomes exceeding \$1200 per week.

There is a high level of home ownership and a high level of housing approvals.

University enrolments by school-leavers are high compared to other regions in Victoria.

It is also a city renowned for its cultural and artistic pursuits.

Ballarat's population is growing at a rate faster than its comparable regional cities and Victoria as a whole.

The city is increasingly multicultural and is economically stable.

However, for a minority of citizens, income is low, unemployment occurs, and there is educational disadvantage for some.

Aspects of the safety of our citizens are also of concern.



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Highlights from these four areas include the low gross weekly income for one-parent families.

Over 21% of these families have an income of less than \$650 per week. Less than 13% have an income of over \$1200 per week.

This is in contrast to couples with children where less than 8% have incomes of less than \$650 per week, whereas over 63% have incomes of more than \$1200 per week.

The variation in educational opportunity is also of concern. Only about 70% of students in government schools complete year 12. This completion rate has not improved over the last ten years.

The difference between the destinations of students from government and private schools stands out.

Twice the percentage of students from private schools enter university education than do students from government schools.

Also the unemployment rate in Ballarat and its region is consistently higher than that for its sister regions and for Victoria overall.

The category of safety deserves special mention.

While Ballarat is a safe place to live, certainly for serious crimes such a murder, robbery against persons and drug-related offences, Ballarat has a worryingly high rate of low-level crimes such as common assault, and property damage.

If we consider the wide sweep of the Vital Signs,

Ballarat and its region should take heart and be quietly pleased with the overall scorecard with by far and away the majority of its citizens leading lives of fulfilment and achievement in one of the most pleasant regions in the nation, but, a minority of the population does not share either the prosperity or the opportunity available in the city and the region.



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I mentioned in the introduction that the Foundation is looking to Vital Signs as a catalyst firstly for opening discussion and secondly as a sound base for action.

The Ballarat Foundation for its part continues to provide leadership, funds and strategies to assist those in need, especially those in educational need and community organisations servicing those needs.

The Foundation encourages the region's Federal, State and Local Government leaders, community foundations and especially leaders from private enterprise to use the information contained in Vital Signs in a co-operative and concerted way to address the areas where we are less than successful and to especially build on the region's strengths.

Taking the broadest of overviews we should aim to be seen as the benchmark in each area of Vital Signs and not be chasing the benchmarks of others. In other words it should be other regional cities that look to Ballarat as the exemplar and not Ballarat running a distant third behind other regional cities.

Our fundamental aspiration and inspiration should be to lead the field. And this will come through strong, collaborative and visionary leadership.