

Opening Address to the Community Colleges Australia Conference

**By The Hon Bronnie Taylor, MLC
Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Premier and Southern NSW
Sydney, 14 November 2018**

Thank you Chicka Madden for that wonderful Welcome to Country.

Thank you for having me here today. John Barilaro would have loved to have been here. He is so passionate about education and extremely passionate about this space; it oozes out of his pores! He backs you all in and he knows how important it is; so again, profuse apologies that you have me today and not him.

I would like to acknowledge:

- David Fuller, Chair of Community Colleges of Australia
- Professor Stephen Parker AO, National Sector Leader for Education at KPMG Australia
- Dr Ricky Shabazz, President, San Diego City College

It's great to be here, because it's important for us all to reflect on the important role that vocational education plays in creating a strong future for this great state.

NSW does have the strongest economy and lowest unemployment in Australia, however, the single biggest threat to our continuing growth is not having the workforce to deliver on our investments.

You can have the money to spend, but if you do not have the skilled workers to actually bring the projects to life, that is an awful lot of projects going nowhere. But more importantly, we want to ensure that people across New South Wales, no matter their background, have the skills they need to get a good job.

Education and employment are so important for the strength of our communities, thanks to the satisfaction, meaning and wellbeing that should come to everyone from the work they do.

There are so many serious social issues we are facing as a society. When I'm participating in one many inquiries at Parliament, I am constantly reminded of the importance of education, to give power to people and give them the skills to take control of their lives.

There is nothing more rewarding than seeing somebody who has had the opportunity of a good education. I come from a little town in Southern NSW called Nimmitabel. I see many people come from extremely disadvantaged situations but when you give them the opportunity of an education, you give them the gift to thrive, and that's what all of you do, every day in your communities.

Community Colleges are overachievers in providing training opportunities and support for students who live in regional NSW or are facing social disadvantage.

You take thousands of students who are older, are Indigenous, have a disability, or are migrants or refugees. And you provide them with the greatest gift; the opportunity of education.

In particular, teaching foundational skills like literacy and English language helps to actually turn people's lives around.

The NSW Government is committed to providing Community Colleges with funding to help you grow and play a more central role.

NSW is now Australia's biggest provider of government-funded Vocational Education and Training.

We have increased funding for Adult Community Education funding by almost a third in just three years to \$21.6 million per year,

This is on top of the \$44.5 million we've committed for training generally under the Smart & Skilled Program since 2015.

For me, the other great thing about Community Colleges and vocational education in general is the choice that it offers to those looking for further education.

Vocational Education has sometimes taken a back seat in how people perceive further education.

We absolutely need and want a strong university sector in NSW but as a passionate advocate for Vocational Education, we want students and parents to know that university isn't their only option for a rewarding career and more importantly for the lifestyle they want.

More and more students, parents and teachers are realising the real value of Vocational Education and the real ability for it to lead to securing a well-paying, quality job.

It is through the stories of those who go through Community Colleges that you really understand the importance of them, and why we are committed to supporting you to succeed.

I will share with you this story I was told about Michael, from the Tweed Valley. Michael is now middle-aged, but he left school early because of bullying. He wanted to learn about IT but he was afraid to be in a classroom.

Murwillumbah Community College designed a program with his Disability Linker, with one-on-one tuition to transition to classroom. His confidence grew and he was soon helping other students, did a Certificate I in IT, plans to do Certificate II then Certificate IV to train others.

Michael said: "I want to thank my Linker and the College for getting me back on track and believing in me." – a really moving story that demonstrates the power of vocational education.

Also, a story from Kiama Community College.

Kiama Community College runs the Skilled and Styled program supporting the local Koori community. The College developed good knowledge of the local Koori community through its Indigenous Liaison Officer Lisa Chapman.

They found out many Indigenous students found it hard to travel to class and could feel alienated once they were there. Their program gives students transport to classes, mentoring and informal lunches that create a sense of belonging. With this innovation has come amazing success – 80% complete components towards formal qualifications, 100% complete non-accredited components like Literacy.

What an outstanding achievement.

Students get work experience with local employers like Fantastic Furniture and local fruit market, which has directly led to some being offered a job. Shows real strength of understanding your local community and tailoring programs to get results.

Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for what you do. I don't mean that just as a statement from a politician. I mean it genuine. We know how important you are; and how valued you are.

Your great strength is that you can tailor things for your local communities; you offer local solutions.

As I said, the reason I came into Parliament was because I was a registered nurse for 20 years. I was one of the McGrath nurses placed in regional NSW. The only reason I became interested in going into politics is because I started in my community, and so many of my patients didn't have access to the services that they should. I knew in Cooma that we could develop an oncology clinic locally that treat patients with chemotherapy. So I set about developing a local solution for our community and about 6 years ago we opened the Cooma Oncology Clinic and people are now treated locally.

What I was part of was a group of people, and it is what you all do every single day. You look at your communities, you see what needs to happen, and you deliver.

Most importantly, you give people the opportunity to change and better their lives, and I think that it is really incredible, and I take my hat off to each and every one of you.