

# EDUCATION & THE WORKFORCE

A collaboration between Deakin University, South West Local Learning & Employment network and South West TAFE

## Filling skills shortages in time of change

The human body is amazing in its capacity to carry us through eventful lives but like a machine it needs to be nurtured, loved, serviced and, occasionally, repaired. From head to toes our bodies are a living, breathing source of work. Podiatrists are needed to care for our feet and psychiatrists are needed to help our heads when they get cloudy. At some stage in our lives just about every part of our body will require "servicing" which requires the input of the health sector. South-west Victoria, like many other regional areas around Australia, struggles to fill these vacancies. Our first edition of *Education and the Workforce* explores some of the options available for work in health and allied health occupations and speaks to some of those who have used the education process to progress their careers.

**A**S south-west Victorian residents get older and become more needy of healthcare they are creating a new set of demands on the health sector.

A variety of health-related service providers are struggling to find suitable job candidates and at the same time the changing demographics of the region is creating a new set of jobs that, in many cases, cannot be filled in the local market.

To some this is a problem — to others it is an opportunity.

The need for more and improved services in a variety of allied health areas has resulted in skills shortages that have prompted major recruitment campaigns nationally and overseas.

Phil Hoggan is behind the region's international recruitment campaign as project manager for Growth Through Skills. Based at the Warrnambool City Council offices, Mr Hoggan says health and allied health are the main areas of shortage.

"For example, finding qualified people for

### TOP 10

The top 10 jobs that are hardest to find employees for are:

- Diesel mechanics
- Doctors
- Registered nurses
- Maternity services
- Mental health services
- Podiatry
- Geriatrics
- Light engine mechanics
- Dentistry
- Optometrists

Source: Growth Through Skills

specialist aged care is an emerging issue with our ageing population, Mr Hoggan said. On another level, a trend for farmers to use four-wheel motorbikes has led to a shortage of light-engine mechanics.

To satisfy demand, the Growth Through Skills project aims to fill skilled vacancies that cannot be met through the existing regional workforce.

"We aim to establish relationships between businesses and skilled migrants to overcome skill shortages," Mr Hoggan said. This includes both on and offshore searches for qualified people to plug the region's specialist needs.

"We have a database of CVs and market the opportunities that this region has to offer at overseas trade fairs and expos," Mr Hoggan said.

"There are multiple opportunities in this region, predominantly in health, allied health and engineering."

The project deals with an ever-changing myriad of employment opportunities, in some cases trying to fill vacancies in industries that didn't even exist a decade ago.

The South West Local Learning and Employment Network is predicting that this constantly-evolving job market will become even more volatile in the future.

"The new workforce is going to be totally different to what came in the past," chief executive officer Toni Jenkins said. "People finishing secondary school now are likely to go through eight to 12 different occupations. That is something that rarely happened in years gone by."

Ms Jenkins said jobs would be created over the next decade that weren't even conceived today. "No one would have been considering a job as a web

designer when they were at school 20 years ago. There are jobs that will be created over the next decade that don't even enter into the wildest imagination of people completing VCE this year."

While not opposing the search for skilled migrants to fill local vacancies, Ms Jenkins said she wanted to encourage the local community to identify employment needs and work and train towards fulfilling them.

"There are careers in this region that young people aren't aspiring to. In the main the general population doesn't have a full understanding of the complexities and changing nature of the workforce. We are trying to promote the need for businesses to adopt an ongoing training culture in order to adapt to a changing environment and economy."

Ms Jenkins said South West LLEN was advocating "lifelong learning".

"Young people need to recognise that they need year 12 VCE or equivalent to remain competitive in the job market and that they need to remain open to new learning."

### BODY OF WORK



## Andrea's long journey

**W**HEN Andrea Edwards signed on for a Bachelor of Arts at Deakin University in 1996 little did she realise that her study and professional development regime would be continuing in 2010.

It has been a long journey but it has been worth every minute as Andrea nears completion of a major milestone in her life and working career. She is putting the finishing touches on her application for full registration as a psychologist after 14 years of juggling work, family and study commitments.

"Would I have started that course in 1996 if I realised it was going to continue for so long," Andrea asks herself. "Yes," is her response.

"I'm sure I didn't think I'd be still studying today... but I'm up for it."

Andrea graduated with her Bachelor of Arts with a major in psychology from Deakin University and a Post Graduate Diploma in Psychology from Monash University. For the past nine years she has worked as a drug and



Andrea Edwards: long haul.

alcohol counsellor at the Western Region Alcohol and Drug (WRAD) centre in Warrnambool and for the past three years has been a provisional psychiatrist.

During this time Andrea has been balancing work and study commitments with her "most important role" as mother to her daughter Lara, now aged 15.

Andrea's love of nursing and supporting people with psychiatric problems stems back to her childhood.

"My father (Bill Edwards) was a psychiatric nurse at Brierly Hospital in Warrnambool and then later with the community team in Lava Street. I used to go with dad when he played cricket at Brierly and I would meet some of

the patients," she said. "It was just part of the normal experience for me to be with people with psychiatric illnesses."

Andrea's desire to work in the field started to take shape around the time she was completing year 10 at Warrnambool High School. "I started to direct my subjects around human biology and development. Nursing was my main thought at the time, especially in the psychiatric field," she said.

In the mid-1980s there was no university course for psychiatric nursing but after graduating from high school Andrea followed her father's footsteps and in 1985 secured a position at Brierly.

After three years of on-the-job training and more formal education sessions with nursing staff, Andrea graduated as a registered psychiatric nurse in 1988.

"It was good to get paid and gain a qualification at the same time, however the university degrees they have now are important for achieving the level of recognition and pay that the role deserves," she said.

## Sharing the workload

**F**OR Loris O'Grady and Jane Dean going to work these days is a new ball game.

Loris and Jane are work partners at St John of God Hospital, alternating in their permanent part-time positions. Both have recently moved careers to become nursing attendants and are enjoying the mature-age change of direction.

The employment journey for Loris started at O'Grady's Florist, while Jane did secretarial work at the former Warrnambool Co-op store. They joined St John of God about seven years ago in environmental services and catering roles before moving to their new positions as nursing attendants in the day-stay surgical unit.

"Sometimes I pinch myself and think seven years ago I didn't have any idea I would be doing this. I was happy making sandwiches but having direct contact with patients is fantastic," Jane said.

Both caregivers completed Certificate 3 in Health Service Assistance through South West TAFE as part of their career change, helping them cement their new positions.

They praise the nurturing culture adopted at St John of God towards the team of caregivers. "The hospital has been great in encouraging us to consider new



Loris O'Grady and Jane Dean.

job opportunities and to undertake training," Jane said. "They actually suggested we do the course."

The course has had direct benefits for the pair. "One of the components involved learning medical terminology, which is very helpful for when we meet patients. It gives us better knowledge of why they are coming to hospital so we can communicate with them and better prepare them," Jane said.

The multi-skilling that emerged with their new positions and qualifications has been a bonus to the hospital.

"We're a relatively small hospital with a close team of workers so it is a real advantage if staff can be

multi-skilled and be able to help out in different areas or cover for people if they're sick," Jane said.

Loris and Jane are relishing their new roles, particularly in working with patients.

"We're the first people they see when they come to the hospital," Loris said.

"Many people can be quite anxious so we try to put them at ease. When they go out and they're feeling great and relieved it's like we've made new friends."

Their tasks also include organising menus and patients' rooms, transporting patients and "generally greeting and making patients feel comfortable".

Chief executive officer Glyn Palmer said Jane and Loris were valuable members of the team and the hospital was keen to encourage staff development through training and education options.

Although happy with their roles assisting the doctors and nurses, Loris and Jane are considering more training and work advancement opportunities.

Loris is considering an option in equipment sterilising and Jane would like to work as an assistant in theatre.

"If you're willing to put in a bit of extra work there are opportunities," Jane said.