

Just the kit for Portland culture

Simon Greening, together with brother Jason, has added a little urban culture to Portland with a new venture based on very cool comics and cartoons...

Lack of schooling a ticking bomb



OPINION – Carol Altmann

[dropcap style="color: #a02f2f;"] T [/dropcap>here is a ticking bomb under south-west Victoria called a lack of education and it is set to blow up in our faces unless we start to do something about it.

For a variety of reasons that are still being nailed down,

hundreds of teenagers in the south-west are dropping out of school and either doing nothing, having babies, drifting, or falling into a nasty, destructive spiral that – once they have tumbled in – is extremely hard to climb out of.

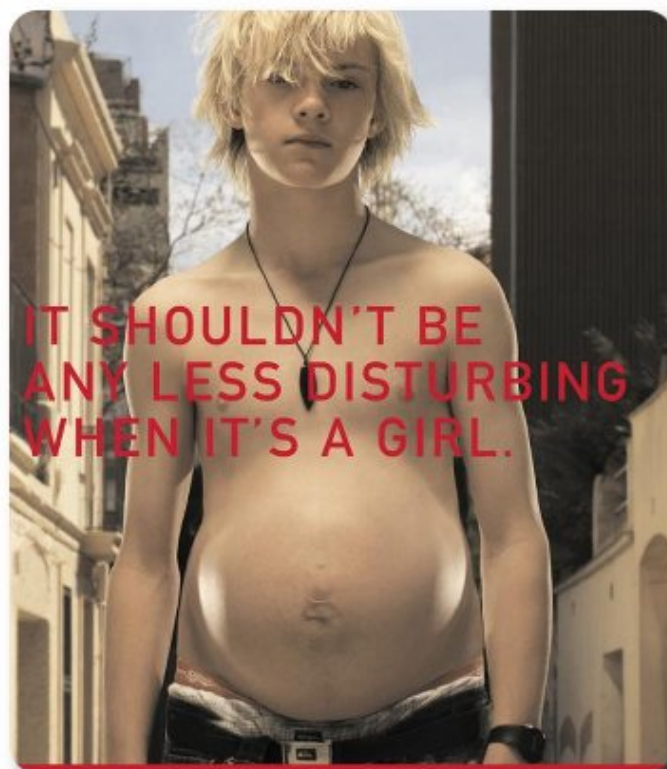
The numbers are chilling.

The six councils that make up the [Great South Coast Group](#) (stretching from Corangamite to the South Australian border and up to Hamilton) have reported that **only 57 per cent** of all school kids in our area are finishing Year 12 or its equivalent.

In some areas, such as in and around Portland and Heywood, is it a lowly **51 per cent**.

For boys, the figures are like those from a bygone era: **44 per cent** in Glenelg, **46 per cent** in Corangamite and **48 per cent** in Moyne.

As one member of the Great South Coast Group put it, we are teetering “on third world standards”.



Teenage pregnancy is among the issues facing the south-west community that are connected to school drop out rates. Image: onemilwaukee.org

[dropcap style="color: #a02f2f;"] T [/dropcap]hese dreadful figures come amid news that youth unemployment among 15-19 years olds [is at its highest level in Victoria since 1997](#), with 20 per cent of kids in this age bracket having absolutely nothing to do when they get up every day.

In short, we are failing the next generation by selling them the great lie that if they don't finish secondary school, they can still have a good future.

They won't, because the sort of jobs that we might have picked up with a Year 9 or Year 10 education are going or gone.

Thousands will be left out and condemned to an under-class that struggles financially, emotionally and socially for their entire lives.

And if *they* fall behind, south-west Victoria will fall behind and become a welfare-basket backwater that can no longer cut it on a national, let alone international scale.

If this all sounds grim, it is because it is and it is happening right before our eyes and we, as a community, are contributing to the problem unless we help to fix it.



Jobs that once filled the gaps are now going or gone. (Fletcher Jones factory floor, Warrnambool. Image: Ralph Illidge, via David Owen, Save the Silver Ball and Fletchers Gardens.)

[dropcap style="color: #a02f2f;"] T [/dropcap>he Great South Coast Group [set up a working party](#) which has spent almost three years trying to get their heads around the enormity of the problem and what to do about it.

At times, one member said, it felt like an almost overwhelming task and no wonder, because in order to *really* make a change, *everything* has to change.

After months of research, thinking and talking, the working group has come up with a broad-scale plan that challenges us to do things differently and to step away from our old ways of thinking.

Take, for example, the thinking that “the government” will

step in and fix it. We have tried that, and it is not working.

What has happened, instead, is that multiple government departments are all tackling the same problem, in their own ways, without talking to each other, without being *allowed* to talk to each other and some kids end up with 12 separate case workers and no long-term solution.

(There is a great anecdote from a homelessness program in Woollomooloo, Sydney, where 52 “service providers” were all helping the homeless without knowing how many homeless they were helping. It turns out there were 90 people sleeping rough and this turned the issue on its head to become the [“90 homes for 90 lives”](#) project.)



While sporting prowess is highly valued in our community, academic ability attracts far less comment.

[dropcap style="color: #a02f2f;"] T lake, as another example, our thinking that the problem starts in early primary school, when kids learn to read and write and do sums.

Wrong. The working party argues that it begins at conception.

The minute that little sperm penetrates that egg, a whole suitcase of potential – or lack of – flips open for that child: is the mother an addict? Is the father? Are they comfortably well-off or poor? Literate or illiterate? Supported or isolated?

And what about the community mindset that worships all forms of sporting prowess, especially football, above academic ability?

This needs to change too.

The working party has based its approach on what is called a [Collective Impact model](#) – snappy title, right? – but it is exciting and has worked very successfully in places like Sweden, Canada and the US, but is only now catching on in Australia.

In a nutshell, it involves motivating the community as a whole – politicians, parents, teachers, employers, philanthropists, business owners, the elderly, service clubs, sporting clubs, *you* and *me* – to work for real change.

Instead of operating in our own little corners, or doing nothing at all, we are urged to work collaboratively and collectively. “That is not my area,” or “that is not my problem,” won’t be part of the language.



[dropcap style="color: #a02f2f;"] T [/dropcap>he first step, and it is happening as we speak, is the Great South Coast Group setting out a community action plan for each council area, because each has its own challenges.

Beautiful little Mortlake, for example, is doing its best not to become a welfare ghetto in the face of low-cost housing, poor services, poor public transport and the sheer boredom of those who have been located there by “the system”.

The action groups aim to get people talking about the problem – like we are now – and set down steps for change that we can *all* be involved in, even if it is something as simple as listening to a child read.

It will take years to turn around a mind-set that has been years in the making, but I think this is the best approach I have seen in a long time and I can’t wait to see it unfold.

Are we all prepared to help?

[box] The Great South Coast working party members include: Helen Bayne (South West PCP), Helen Durant (Great South Coast Early Years Network), Karen Foster (Great South Coast), Toni Jenkins (South-West LLEN), Marcus McCormick (South-West LLEN), Vicky Mason (W’bool City Council), Anne Murphy (Glenelg &

Southern Grampians LLEN), Mary Pendergast (Dept of Education and Early Childhood Development) and Kaye Schofield (RMIT Hamilton). You can [read more about the project here](#).[/box]

[button link="http://the-terrier.com.au/subscribe-2/" type="icon" icon="heart" newwindow="yes"] Would you like to have early access to our Opinion pieces? Please subscribe here.[/button]



Read more Opinion pieces here...

[Trader levy deal...and the Jennifer Lowe factor](#)

[Council's racing hospitality bill hard to swallow](#)

[Reekie to challenge Napthine at state election](#)

[Forget cover ups, roll right over Rolf](#)

[Community vision should extend city wide: Julie Eagles](#)

[Flagstaff Hill at \\$15 million crossroad](#)

[Scrap trader levy and start over](#)

[What is holding Portland back?](#)

Birthday edition – prize

winners



CLOSED

[dropcap style="color:#A02F2F;"] T [/dropcap]o celebrate our first birthday we have given away some sensational prizes each week for the past four weeks. We love to reward our supporters!

All of these prizes were available thanks to the generosity of some of our wonderful business supporters and local artists – thankyou to each of these people for believing in *Bluestone Magazine* and helping us continue to grow.

Below is the list of winners for our final week. If you would like to be part of future competitions, please [subscribe](#) and join the ever-growing Bluestone Club.

[box]

Week 4: CLOSED – winners: Colleen Rentsch, a \$40 voucher [Whale Bone Gallery](#), Port Fairy; **Philip Trigg**, a \$40 voucher from [Brightbird Espresso](#), Warrnambool; **Rebecca McGrath**, a unique ‘softie’ babbitt (child’s soft toy), by W’bool artist [Megan Nicolson](#) (value \$45).

* *

Week 1: CLOSED – winners: Kylie Oates (\$100 Merrijig voucher); **Rose Pritchard** (Lana's Garden hamper); **Ondrea Howie** (*Warrnambool: This is Home*, plus a limited edition Bluestone Magazine mug!).

Week 2: CLOSED – winners: Heather Armstrong (bag, matching wallet and purse (valued at \$165) from Lizzie's Labels of Love,); **Bronwyn Lane** (\$40 voucher from Brightbird Espresso); and **Lori Cameron** (handcrafted ceramic noodle bowl by Clare Fennessy, value \$50).

Week 3: CLOSED – winners: Gillian Cumming (one night's accommodation at [Harmony at Tower Hill](#)); **Peter Clayfield** (\$50 voucher [Piccolo Restaurant](#)) and **Phyllis Walsh** (\$40 voucher from [Lozzar's Lounge Cafe](#)). [/box]

Thank you to all those people who support *Bluestone Magazine* by being either paying subscribers or business supporters or both. We would not have made it this far without you.

On we go!

Carol & Louise

New book: Warrnambool – This is home



Me – Carol Altmann – with my self-published tribute to my hometown of Warrnambool that will be launched on August 19.

[box] **“Warrnambool – This is home” is limited to 500 signed and numbered copies: \$30 plus \$8 flat postage anywhere in Australia. You can [order a book direct from the author by direct deposit or Paypal](#). Books are also available from [Warrnambool Books](#), Fairy St.** [/box]

[dropcap style="color: #a5cecd;"] W [/dropcap]hen I first returned to live in my hometown of Warrnambool in early 2013 after being away for more than 20 years, I had a new appreciation for the ties that bind people from this seaside city.

Despite Warrnambool now being a place of 32,000 people, we all feel like we know each other and, if we don't, we spend a few minutes playing what one friend described to me as “the game”.

This is where you ask each other what school you went to, or the names of your parents/brothers/sisters, or if you knew such-and-such and – usually – within no more than four or five moves, “bingo!” you have made a connection.

But it is also more than that.

It is the environment that also connects us: the wild ocean, the bent trees, the Norfolk pines, the whales, the restless wind...

And it is even more than that.

It is the iconic people and places that are so familiar to us and that we remember so fondly, even nostalgically, as we all age and they start to slip away. Names like Swintons, Kermonds, Macks Snacks, Ryan's Removals, The Savoy, Rauert's shoe store, Politis fish and chips, the Matera Brothers and on it goes.

I chose 30 of these icons to photograph and write briefly (snapshots) about – I could have chosen many more – as a small collection of some of the places and faces that connect us as being “from Warrnambool”, even if we live many miles away.



Warrnambool identities: John, Maroulla and Peter Sycopoulis in front of their Kepler St family home.

The book is dedicated to Maroulla, who passed away earlier this year.

[dropcap style="color: #a5cecd;"] A [/dropcap]s the book unfolded, I felt an increasing sense of urgency to capture these special places and faces before it was too late, because there is no doubt Warrnambool is facing unprecedented challenges that are seeing many businesses close and not replaced by others.

In the 16 months since I started this book, the Savoy has closed, the Criterion Hotel building has been pulled down and Lucas Bros butchers was sold out of the family. Just this week it was announced that Capricorn Records would come to an end next month after 35 years.

Warrnambool is changing and, as with any change, there is both an anticipation about what might come and a sadness about what has been lost.

This book is my attempt to preserve some of our shared and precious past.

As I say in the introduction: "Whether you live in Warrnambool, or you simply carry it in your heart, this is a tribute to the place by the sea that no matter how widely we travel, we will always call home".

* * *

***Warrnambool – This is home* features the following:** Swinton's Supermarket (Val Grundy/Dot Grauer); Lucas Bros Butchers (Ken Lucas); Materia Bros (Mario, Paul and Mark Materia); the Sycopoulis family home (John, Maroulla and Peter Sycopoulis); Kermond's Snack Bar (Rob and Bill Kermond); Mack's Snacks (Graeme, Keith and Paul McLeod); Savoy Restaurant (Alan Tampion); Rauert's Shoe Store (Ron and Peter Rauert); The Bowl (Lucas Reid and Andrea Occhipinti); Politis Seafood (Helen, George and Chris Politis); Robert Ulmann whale mural (Justy

Ulmann); Warrnambool Surf Lifesaving Club (Lisa Logan (Cole), Ben Logan, Ron Cole); The Warrnambool Standard (Peter Collins and Peter Fletcher); The Warrnambool Woollen Mill site (Mary Jackson); Chittick's Bakery (Ian Robb and John Chittick); Capitol Cinema (Ivan Berndt); Fletcher Jones Gardens (Lex Caldwell); The Quarry/ art collectives (Claire Drylie) Ryan's Removals (Frank and Graeme Ryan); 3YB radio (Steve Welsh and Lyndsay Hill); W'bool Grand Annual Steeplechase (Brian McIver); W'bool Aquarium (Donna Krebs (Livingston); Timor St Newsagency (Brian Mills); Bojangles Pizza (Simon Mugavin); Isles General Store (Ken Isles); McNeil's BP Service Station (Noel McNeil); the War Memorial Angel; T&G clocktower (Peter Hogg); The Criterion Hotel.

[box type="bio"] ***Warrnambool – This is home* will be limited to 500 numbered and signed editions. If you would like to order a copy (\$30 plus \$8 flat postage if required) from Bluestone Magazine, [you can do so here](#). Books are also on sale at [Warrnambool Books](#).** [/box]

[button link="http://the-terrier.com.au/subscribe-2/" type="icon" icon="heart" newwindow="yes"] Did you enjoy this story? Please subscribe here to help Bluestone thrive.[/button]



You might also enjoy...

[Unravelling a tale of love in Port Fairy](#)

[Bool Belles review: Old Filth](#)

[From artist to children's author: Fiona Clarke](#)

[Bool Bellies Review: Mullumbimby, Melissa Lucashenko](#)

[A love story built on literary lives: Allan and Wendy Scarfe](#)

Warrnambool – This is home



[dropcap style="color: #a5cecd;"] T [/dropcap>his limited edition book is no longer available for general sale.

The last two copies will be offered as a Bluestone Magazine subscriber-only giveaway in February, so if you are a Bluestone subscriber, keep an eye peeled.

Thankyou so much to everyone who has bought this book, read it, loved it and taken the time to write to say how much they enjoyed this small tribute to our hometown.

[Warrnambool – This is home](#)

Carol