

Different mindset needed

By Di Stanley

The Outback Mind Foundation has pleaded with Gladstone regional councillors to better understand the work it is doing in the community to ignite important conversations around domestic violence within its men's circles.

OMF board member Dean Cooper said he was disappointed with the portrayal of the foundation's work at the 23 April meeting where a \$29,925 application from the council's Elevator Fund to widen distribution points for screenings of the documentary Boiling Point was refused.

Cr Michelle Wagner questioned the foundation's credentials and said the documentary had raised red flags for her with some of its commentary, including 'men are victims too' and 'it takes two to tango'.

Her comments were the catalyst for a 40-minute debate in the council chamber.

"The application for funding was for screening of the Boiling Point documentary to be played in workplaces around the Gladstone region, with the aim of sparking conversations about domestic violence, encourage men to implement practical ways to manage their emotional charge, foster understanding, empathy, and ultimately, drive positive change," Mr Cooper told Gladstone Today.

"At no stage did we advertise ourselves as a service to replace men's behavioural change programs or insinuate we are a perpetrator-specific program.

"Our circles don't justify or excuse harmful behaviour.

"We create a space where men can be honest and are held gently and respectfully accountable.

"We have clear procedures to share information to the appropriate authorities if we



Snubbed by the Gladstone Regional Council, The Outback Mind Foundation's Aaron Schultz accepted a \$7500 donation from Australia Pacific LNG's community giving program. "It will really help us to grow and support more communities," Mr Schultz said. Picture: SUPPLIED

suspect someone is a risk to themselves or to others."

Mr Cooper, an expert in the field of domestic and family violence who facilitates training across Australia to staff from police, cor-

rections, and probation and parole, said the foundation had 11 circles currently servicing rural communities with more than 1400 men accessing support as a result.

"This is a service that men are subscribing

to and who haven't accessed support elsewhere," he said.

"The foundation is committed to provide such support men in regional, with or without the assistance of the Gladstone Regional Council."

Mr Cooper said Boiling Point was a tool to open up conversations about how men were showing up in their relationships and to prompt them to reflect and seek any appropriate supports they needed.

"The documentary incorporates commentary from a range of perspectives, including a reformed perpetrator who pleads with men who may be using violence to take accountability and address their behaviour," he said.

"The insinuation this documentary shifts accountability away from perpetrators is inaccurate and not consistent with feedback viewers have provided thus far.

"The Outback Mind Foundation provides men's circles which consist of facilitated group discussions, meditation, exploring of practical tools to self-regulate and other practices aimed at fostering emotional expression accountability and connection among participants.

"Our circles aim to ground me, provide them practical tools to regulate their emotions, offer emotional support, develop coping strategies to discourage substance use and provide emotional literacy education.

"The suggestion our work could raise the risk of someone offending or poses risk to the community disappointingly inaccurate.

"It's well known men who have the skills to regulate their emotions, reflect on their behaviour, are not self-medicating with substances to regulate themselves, and are stable, are less likely to engage in offending behaviour."

Planned childcare facility will ease pressure on parents

By Di Stanley

A new childcare development creating 130 placements and around 40 jobs is being proposed to ease pressure points for Gladstone parents.

Proponent Melissa Webster, who opened an early learning educational facility First5Years in Emerald a year ago, said West Gladstone had been identified as the preferred location.

A development application is soon to be lodged with the Gladstone Regional Council.

"A year ago, during a timely conversation with Flynn MP Colin Boyce, the discussion quickly led to identifying Gladstone as a critical area needing more childcare services, setting the stage for First5Years' next venture," Ms Webster said.

"I spent days near East Shores, engaging with families and local business owners, really getting to know the pulse of the town.

"I think I drove every street in Gladstone in search of the right site."



The First5Years early childhood learning centre opened in Emerald in May 2023. A similar development is proposed for a site in West Gladstone. Picture: SUPPLIED

Ms Webster said her deep-dive into the local landscape was part of a thorough due diligence process, which she said was underscored by the town's booming port and industrial activities, a prominent factor in her plans.

"The search concluded in West Gladstone, an area that had been pinpointed by the Federal Government as needing additional childcare facilities," she said.

"This location has been strategically chosen for its proximity to schools, workplaces, recreational facilities and the town centre, aligning well with the logistical needs of local families."

"As the Gladstone region continues to expand, the demand for high-quality childcare is expected to rise.

"Enabling women to advance in their chosen careers, improving their economic standing and ability to thrive personally are key components of our service.

"Access to dependable childcare is essential for unlocking the potential talent necessary for the continued growth of business and government institutions in the region."

Ms Webster said First5Years' commitment was for local collaboration and sustainability. Her company has partnered with Zone

Planning, a Gladstone-based town planning firm, and Marlowe Architects, a Queensland firm specialising in childcare.

"We have initiated the first step towards approval for this state-of-the-art learning facility," Ms Webster said.

"Our intention is to employ local trades and consultants throughout the development process."

Ms Webster employed a similar approach her Emerald childcare facility, built on a vacant lot she purchased in Retro Street.

"We are looking forward to bringing something truly special to Gladstone, a facility that supports not just the early learning of children but also the broader needs of working families," she said.

"This new childcare development promises to be a pivotal addition to Gladstone, supporting the community's economic and social fabric through enhanced childcare services and contributing to a robust support system for working parents in the region."

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