

## Inquiry into the Use of School Buses in Rural and Regional Victoria

Mr Greg Thompson

**Organisation Name:** Phillip Island Community and Learning Centre

**Your position or role:** Phillip Island Community and Learning Centre

### YOUR SUBMISSION

**Submission:**

Phillip Island is a rural area of transport disadvantage, if you don't have your own vehicle and have to rely upon public transport. The only available public transport is a bus service.

There are large cohorts within the Phillip Island community who do have to rely upon public transport for accessing essential services and supplies. These include youth, people who live with disabilities, vulnerable low-income households and elderly people.

Most specialist support services catering to these vulnerable cohorts are based in Wonthaggi, which is a two-hour bus trip (one-way) due to the distance and number of interchanges on route. There are only a limited number of bus services to and from Wonthaggi each day.

PICAL is the largest social welfare outlet on Phillip island and the only such outlet which is open every weekday. We are also the largest emergency food relief outlet and largest volunteer organisation in the entire South Gippsland region, so we see many vulnerable people each week. These vulnerabilities include homelessness; extreme financial hardship; unemployment; victims of family violence; people with mental health issues and other congenital disabilities; and people living with substance-abuse habits. If these people don't have their own vehicles (and/or adequate funding for fuel), their vulnerabilities are exacerbated by the fact that they cannot get to Wonthaggi (or further afield) to access the specialist support services that are equipped to properly address these vulnerabilities.

PICAL is the only Adult Learning outlet on Phillip Island, but our learning programs are limited to ACFE Learn Local pre-accredited training courses and some outreach workplace training delivered from our premises by external Registered Training Organisations. The nearest tertiary training institutes are Chisholm TAFE at Wonthaggi or Gippsland TAFE at Warragul.

Phillip Island's economy is based on Tourism and Hospitality both of which are highly seasonal and employ a largely casualised workforce of low-skilled workers. So whilst PICAL endeavours to up-skill as many local unemployed people as possible and we try to partner with surrounding TAFEs to provide pathways to further tertiary education, again it is the "tyranny of distance" issue which is the main barrier to unemployed unskilled workers accessing any further education opportunities.

As part of the spectrum of services we deliver to vulnerable cohorts on Phillip Island, we also operate a Centrelink Sub-Agency from our premises (with the nearest main Centrelink Service Centre also located in Wonthaggi). We hear the same "tyranny of distance" complaints from our Centrelink customers. Unemployed people without their own vehicles are doubly-disadvantaged if they have to travel to look for jobs.

PICAL fed 5,485 vulnerable people in 2020, who live continuously in a state of "food insecurity" and who are almost trapped in their vulnerable situations due to the lack of nearby, easily accessible specialist support services. PICAL also hosted almost 10,000 day-visits in 2020 (during COVID) from people who required one or more of our essential services.

Whilst we do the best we can, we are not funded nor equipped to properly address many areas of vulnerability, yet we are the only locally accessible social-welfare outlet available on Phillip Island, and as stated above, most local vulnerable residents cannot access the nearest specialist support services.

A more regular, more accessible and more cost-effective public transport service would go a long way to alleviating some of this entrenched disadvantage, and if this can be achieved via opening School Buses to public access, then this will be of great benefit to the most needy cohorts on Phillip Island and in the surrounding waterline areas.

For a more fulsome overview of everything that PICAL offers, please see the attached PICAL 2020 Annual Report.

Greg Thompson  
Centre Manager, PICAL

#### **FILE ATTACHMENTS**

**File1:** [606e80484d93a-PICAL Annual Report 2020 Compressed.pdf](#)

**File2:**

**File3:**

**Signature:**

Greg Thompson