



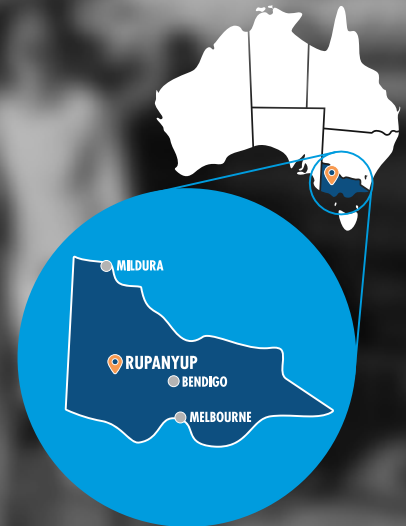
BACKGROUND

Rupanyup is a small town in rural Victoria situated in the heart of the Wimmera Wheatbelt. Rupanyup is approximately 300 kilometres north west of Melbourne.

With a population of 536, this is very much a farming community, known for its rich black soils ideal for growing winter crops.

Rupanyup has several services and facilities, including a local primary school, doctor's surgery, machinery dealership, and aged care facility.

This small town is also the home of Rupanyup/Minyip Community Bank. Established 20 years ago, it was the first of what is now a national network of 316 community banks across the country.



RUPANYUP'S MIGRATION STORY

Rupanyup's migrant settlement plan is in its infancy, with locals David and Sam Matthews the driving force behind the project.

A third-generation farmer, David Matthews and his wife Sam have witnessed the impact farm consolidation has had on the social fabric of their district. Both believe the most sustainable way to address this problem is to find a commercial solution.

In 1993, the pair established Wimmera Grain Company (WGC), to value-add pulse crops grown in the region. This business now employs 20 people.

Five years later, the Matthews helped set up an agreement between Rupanyup and the neighbouring town of Minyip to pilot a new banking model involving a not-for-profit company and Bendigo Bank. The resulting Rupanyup/Minyip Community Bank became Australia's first community bank, leading the way for more than 300 additional community banks around the country.

Through their commercial ventures, the Matthews have been able to sponsor a mechanic from India, Inderjeet Singh, and two Columbian vets, Guillermo Sierra Cespedes and Magda Liliana Medina.

Inderjeet Singh now lives with his family in Echuca, where they have a restaurant and a taxi.

Guillermo works as the Matthews' farm manager, whereas Magda is employed at the aged care facility in town. Guillermo and Magda have just purchased their second house in Rupanyup, which they're renting out to another migrant family who is also working locally. Guillermo's cousin is also looking to move to town as she has dreams of running the local bakery.



QUESTIONS FROM RUPANYUP

1. Can the Federal Government provide funding to support a regional position to coordinate all the stakeholders required to achieve successful migrant settlement outcomes at the local level?

2. Can our politicians look at a smarter way to handle the distribution of immigrants in Australia, rather than only focus on the numbers of new entrants to the country?

LESSONS LEARNED

While community-led projects can certainly deliver the results that residents are looking for, like many rural towns taking on regional migrant settlement projects, those involved in making it all happen are volunteers.

In Rupanyup, David Matthews says there is a need for a regional coordinator to be employed to bring all the stakeholders together and manage the overall project. He said, “once you start doing this, you realise there are many moving parts and bringing it all together is the challenge”.

While locals believe they have a wonderful environment to entice migrants, they agree they have to get better at promoting the opportunities Rupanyup has to offer.

A community prospectus that highlights the affordable housing opportunities in town, as well as the well-resourced local school, and job opportunities, is being considered to help get the word out.

When it comes to introducing migrants into a rural community, this towns says starting with a small group of migrants and making them feel welcome is the way to go.

In Rupanyup’s experience, the successful settlement of one family is the best advertisement for others looking to make the move to regional Australia.



CHALLENGES AHEAD

Rupanyup is trying to build a model that will help reinvigorate economic activity in the town. The community is looking to use business to create social change. If it works, they want to share the idea with any rural towns willing to take up the challenge of addressing population decline.

When the Rupanyup/Minyip Community Bank was established in 1998, the cash surplus was initially used to improve local facilities, such as painting local buildings and funding sporting groups. David Matthews now believes investment needs to be about driving economic activity in the town and finding solutions to fix population decline.

Rupanyup, through its local economic development group E-Rup, is focussed on improving its retail offering by building a community supermarket to re-invigorate

the town centre and make it an attractive option for newcomers.

Rupanyup is also exploring the idea that the community bank network across Australia could be the support base for regional settlement programs in rural towns.

Mr Matthews has said that, in many cases, these community banks are the only financial facility in town, and the connections they have with the community are significant and valuable. According to Mr Matthews, the community bank is well equipped in many rural towns to identify housing and job opportunities for migrants looking for a life in the country, and this is the ideal formula for successful settlement programs.

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