

Funds to boost retention rates

THE LATROBE Valley's low year 12 school retention rates will be targeted under new Federal Government funding awarded to Berry Street Gippsland.

The Nationals Member for Gippsland Darren Chester said Berry Street would receive \$500,000 to support teenagers aged 15 to 19 years to stay at school longer.

The funding will also assist young people to find jobs and support them through difficulties so they keep those jobs.

Mr Chester said Gippsland had lower incomes and higher levels of unemployment than the state average, which is linked to low educational attainment.

"Adult, Community and Further Education (ACFE) statistics show only 46% of Gippsland residents have achieved year 12 completion and around half have a post-school qualification," Mr Chester said.

"The Latrobe Valley is named as the most disadvantaged region in

Gippsland with the lowest levels of educational attainment by the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA).

"I have no doubt that our young people are smart enough and have the ability to compete with the rest of the state - so this must come from disadvantage: the cost of education, the ability of families to support students through school, the cost of university and providing aspiration for our students.

"The key to future success is encouraging our young people to place a high value on education and achieving their best."

Mr Chester has also led a community campaign to secure additional income support for students forced to move away from home to attend university.

"We need to do more to reduce the economic barriers for students from regional areas who are forced to move to complete their chosen course," Mr Chester said.



Supporting students: Darren Chester has worked with local students to promote the need for increased income support to help regional students to attend university.

Rising from the ashes

FEDERAL Parliament has been urged to recognise the need for long-term support as communities affected by the Black Saturday and Boolarra bushfires continue the recovery process.

On the first anniversary of the bushfires, The Nationals Member for Gippsland Darren Chester told Parliament that families affected by the bushfires were thankful for the support that they had received but the road to recovery was not complete.

"If there is one other message it is that we cannot forget that there is still a long way to go with the recovery process," Mr Chester said.

"The bush will recover, the regrowth is there now and homes are being built but people will recover at very different speeds.

"Long after the scars on the landscape have recovered, the scars will still be there for them both physically and mentally.

"Fire affected communities will need our support for many years ahead. We must never forget them and we must learn from the experience they have been through in these past 12 months."

Mr Chester also spoke about the unveiling of the phoenix sculpture (pictured right) at the Traralgon South CFA sheds.

He congratulated the local community for initiating the project as a mark of respect for bushfire victims.

Memorial:

Wayne Simmons, Russell Northe, Darren Chester and Benn Frederiksen at the unveiling of the phoenix.



Support for Morwell Cultural Centre

FUNDING to extend the Gippsland Immigration Wall of Recognition through the development of a \$1.5m Immigrant Cultural Centre and Museum in Morwell has been called for in Federal Parliament.

The Nationals Member for Gippsland Darren Chester recently spoke in Parliament to express his support for the project which has been developed by the Gippsland Ethnic Community Council (GECC).

Earlier this year, Mr Chester personally submitted an application for funding worth \$460,000 on behalf of GECC to the office of the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations.

He said the Gippsland Immigration Wall of Recognition has become a significant tourism attraction in the Latrobe Valley since opening in 2007 and funding that would enable the attraction to include an Immigrant Cultural Centre and Museum

should be supported by the Federal Government.

"The local volunteer committee have done a fantastic job in establishing the popular Gippsland Immigration Wall of Recognition," Mr Chester told Parliament.

"A cultural centre and museum would provide a place to reflect and celebrate the achievements and contribution of immigrants who have helped to make the Latrobe Valley the prosperous community that it is today."



Funding needed: Darren Chester and Don Difabrizio viewing plans for a new cultural centre in Morwell

Win in fight for cataract rebate

THE RUDD Labor Government has been forced to back down on proposed cuts to cataract rebates that would have cost patients an extra \$300 for surgery.

The Nationals Member for Gippsland Darren Chester and his Coalition colleagues had a win when they forced the Government to review its proposed cuts.

The Government proposed to decrease the Medicare rebate for cataract surgery from \$623.70 to \$312.64. However, The Nationals and Liberals forced a compromise revised rebate of \$548.85.

Mr Chester said the cut proposed by the Rudd Labor Government would have had a major impact on the health and financial well-being of many older residents who may have deferred cataract surgery due to the increased cost.

Mr Chester said he would continue to fight for improved access to affordable health services for people in the Latrobe Valley.

"I'm well aware that many older residents find it difficult to manage with increased costs of living, let alone facing increased health costs associated with government decisions," Mr Chester said.

In another win for local families, the Federal Government has increased the subsidy available to purchase insulin

pumps for children diagnosed with type 1 diabetes.

Mr Chester actively lobbied the Government to better support patients requiring an insulin pump, worth about \$8000. Previously the maximum rebate was \$2500, meaning families needed to find more than \$5000 every four years toward the cost.

Under the changes, there will be an increase in the maximum subsidy from \$2500 to \$6400.

Mr Chester paid credit to the role of Gippsland paediatrician Dr Peter Goss who has been instrumental in raising awareness of type 1 diabetes and has implemented a successful insulin pump program in the region.

"It was unrealistic and unfair to expect the families of children with type 1 diabetes to find most of the \$8000 purchase price for an insulin pump, especially those families on low-incomes," Mr Chester said.

"The Minister has made the right decision by listening to the concerns of type 1 diabetics, their families and doctors to improve affordability for this highly-valued service.

Mr Chester said he would continue to lobby the government to improve access to medical services that can improve the lives of Gippslanders and all regional Australians.