

Opening Welcome – Group Training Australia Conference Darwin 2002

It is good to be here

To the women and men of Group Training – the delegates – the stakeholders – government representatives – advocates and guest speakers...

I say Welcome to the 2002 National Group Training Conference here at the MGM Grand in Darwin

Can I first thank all of you for committing considerable time and resources in making the trek to Darwin

Many years ago GTA decided to hold a national conference in each capital of every State and Territory

Being here in Darwin completes that cycle

And it is particularly appropriate that we do this in the official “Year of the Outback”

This location not only allows us to enjoy the many delights that Darwin has to offer, but importantly it affords us the opportunity to pay our own tribute to a unique part of the world – the “Australian Outback”

And that is why it is very appropriate that our Closing Keynote will be delivered by Ms Terry Underwood, Year of the Outback Ambassador

Can I acknowledge the traditional owners of this land upon which we gather here today – The Larrakia Nation

I want to also sincerely thank the Northern Territory Government and in particular, the Hon Syd Sterling, Deputy Chief Minister and Minister for Employment, Education and Training for the very generous and wonderful welcome last evening

Off the top, I would like to acknowledge our major sponsors of this Conference – the Australian National Training Authority, the Enterprise and Career Education Foundation, the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training – in particular, the New Apprenticeships Branch and Employment Programs Australia

We gather here today under the Conference banner of “ Building Brighter Futures”

For Group Training

For ourselves

And in particular, for the thousands of apprentices and trainees that group training employs “Building Brighter Futures” is a positive and optimistic theme and I hope it sets the tone for Conference proceedings

Despite the many challenges that Group Training has had to face over the past many years...

I do believe that we have much to be positive and optimistic about

It is not the place for me in this opening welcome to deliver a Group Training monologue – (I shall do that elsewhere)

But I would like to say this:

There is no doubt that many in Group Training have, over the years, felt somewhat battered, bruised and disillusioned as a result of various shifts in government policy and a fundamental reshaping of the labour market and the employment services operating within that market

Yet Group Training has risen to the challenge, continues to survive and thrive and indeed, in many cases – shines – due mainly to the commitment and dedication of those working in the sector as well to the fact that Group Training is a flexible and quality product

It shines because

It has over 36,000 individual success stories to tell

It works alongside 40,000 businesses nation-wide

It excels in the areas of indigenous and disability training

It is critical to the survival of the traditional trades

It leads the way in school-based apprenticeships and traineeships

It has a critical role to play in school to work transitions and in managing and coordinating structured workplace learning programs

It plays an important part in identifying and alleviating skill shortages;

Its presence is fundamental to hundreds of local communities across this country

It builds social and training infrastructures

It is committed to delivering "pastoral care"

And without it – tens of thousands of young Australians would not have been given the opportunity to be skilled and employed.

There is so much to be proud of - and during the course of this conference, one should not be shy in showing that pride

Group Training has been busy building brighter futures for over twenty years now

Indeed, between 1994 and 2001, there have been over 140,000 Group Training commencements

140,000 futures that Group Training has been a fundamental part of

This conference allows us then to recognise and celebrate the many significant achievements of Group Training in a positive and optimistic way

But importantly it will allow us to constructively focus on the future, the challenges ahead and what will be needed to ensure that Group Training continues to build bright futures for young Australians

In many respects, Group Training has reached a critical time in its relatively short but successful life.

Now in its "early twenties" - Group Training is, for the most part, in good shape - having survived its "teenage years" pretty much intact – save for the odd stumble and fall

Like most "teenagers", Group Training had to adjust to a constantly changing and at times confusing world – along the way having to discard some of its outdated clothing and ideas - and embrace new fashions and new ideas

Some of the new clothes have not fitted all that well

And some of the new ideas have not been received with wild enthusiasm

So - like most teenagers – Group Training threw the odd temper tantrum – and sulked and carried on that "nobody loves me anymore"

But such behaviour never lasted too long... there was just too much work to be done

And now – the "twenty-something, grown-up" Group Training is facing yet another test of character and confronting another major challenge

This one goes to the very core of its future

And to its capacity to be around to celebrate its 30th birthday and many more after that

This new challenge will be about the standard and quality of its service, the level of funding it receives; and the capacity it has to continue to deliver to government, the community, parents and young people – a range of quality employment and training opportunities

It is quite a challenge – how to secure the future of the industry whilst continuing the job of consolidating the futures of tens of thousands of young Australians

This Conference will provide us all with the opportunity to learn something new, pass on advice and wisdom to others, engage in robust debate, talk to old and new colleagues and friends and generally enjoy ourselves.

I believe the program that has been put together for this conference is excellent

A very diverse range of top quality speakers have come together to collectively tackle some of the fundamental and critical issues facing Group Training

It gives one cause to feel very positive and optimistic

We are delighted that ANTA CEO Moira Scollay and ANTA Chairman Stuart Hornery are here to perform their opening “double-act”

It is a great honour to have two of vocational education and training’s most senior and influential people here to be part of the conference.

We particularly look forward to hearing both Moira and Stuart give us their views and set down their challenges for Group Training, most notably in the context of the recent ANTA Review and the National Standards that will come into effect from 1 January 2003

We are equally proud to have Bill Mansfield here at the conference to deliver the Lance Barnard Memorial Address – Bill, as you know, is a very distinguished Australian and a major influence on the Australian union movement and training sector over many years.

The list goes on – Dr Simon “don’t call me Geoffrey Robertson” Longstaff of the St.James Ethics Centre

Bill Healey – CEO of the Enterprise and Career Education Foundation

Daniel Labbad – CEO of The Hornery Institute

John Buchanan – Deputy Director of ACCIRT and long-time friend of Group Training

Rosemary Hoskins and Dr Greg Lewis who have both worked with GTA to produce two ANTA-funded publications on Best Practice for Group Training in the indigenous and disability areas

Terry Kilmister and Roger Dench – highly regarded experts in their respective fields and both very well known to Group Training

Kerry Anne Tatchell – GTA’s project officer for rural sector apprenticeships

And Robyn Pearce – a pre-eminent professional in “time management” – something all of us could well take note of.

It is a fantastic line up that does justice to “Building Brighter Futures”

Can I also acknowledge and thank some other participants who will be part of the conference proceedings over the next few days – notably Mr Geoff Foster from the Victorian Department of Education and Training and

Mr Colin Walters and his colleagues from the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training.

I think it is great that senior State and Commonwealth public servants will be strongly represented here and willing to participate in proceedings – it is another step along the pathway of building stronger stakeholder relationships

In particular, can I say how delighted I am to see Colin Walters here from DEST – in a previous life I knew Colin very well over a number of years – I, like many of you here, look forward to his particular contribution in the hypothetical debate on ethics

Before I hand back to Jo Pearson, I would like to acknowledge and thank two people for putting this conference together – Ms Julie Mackey and Ms Jane Yeamon

They have done a tremendous job in getting us to the starting line.

Group Training Australia is very proud to have the responsibility for staging this event

We are proud that so many of our member companies enthusiastically support it

We are just as proud that several Group Training Companies that are not members of the national association have also seen fit to be here this year

All of us coming together under the one banner to showcase and highlight the success and quality of Group Training and its role in skilling our nation

Last week in the Australian Financial Review there was a major article on the many challenges and issues confronting Australia, in successfully training our workforce and dealing with skill shortages

It was a very provocative and robust piece and featured a range of comments from all sorts of training and industry representatives

Underpinning the entire story was the issue of “quality” and ensuring that quality training and skilling are taking place

Great strides have been taken over the past decade, but judging from some of the forceful views expressed in the article, we clearly have some way to go yet

But the good news is that there is no turning back

Training and skilling are firmly part of government’s agenda and all of us must continue to work to ensure that it remains a central component of government policy well into the future

Opportunities abound and Group Training must always be positioning itself to be part of the “training challenge” and to be the preferred vehicle for more and more employers to take on an apprentice and trainee

A recent business survey bears this imperative out – when it reported that 37% of businesses in mainland states intended to hire more apprentices over the next five years – which was up from 20% a year ago.

Whilst the survey is very encouraging from that point of view, it does highlight the fact that a substantial number of businesses are still reluctant to take on an apprentice due to financial costs and administrative burden

Group Training is “made to order” for many of these employers – as relevant now as it ever was

Again...welcome to you all...

Let the pigeons loose and the games begin.....

Enjoy the Conference and thank you for being part of GTA's passion for “Building Brighter Futures”