

Hepburn Skill Store

CLUNES REPORT

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Foreword

One community's vision for a strong and prosperous future

There are so many factors that influence a community's local economy and development that it is difficult to isolate issues, let alone identify where you can have an impact. But in Clunes, Victoria, this is what the town has done aided by local council community planning and their own initiative.

Recent studies⁽¹⁾ show that aspiration, education and soft skills like flexibility, problem solving, creativity and communication lie at the heart of personal prosperity and well-being now and in the future.

The conversations that have shaped this report show how Clunes traders and the community have isolated these issues as critical barriers to success in our town, and identified together, a multi-faceted strategy led locally to address this. This strategy is a significant undertaking. Yet with support the outcomes it offers are real and achievable, changing lives one person at a time, while also strengthening the local and visitor economy.

I recommend this report and look forward to working with the Clunes community to grow our local economy and contribute to the liveability of our town.

Cr Neil Newitt
Councillor, Cameron Ward
August, 2017



Introduction

"There was never a night or a problem that could not be defeated by sunrise and hope."
Bernard Williams, philosopher

Sometimes the complexities of modern society can seem beyond an individual's influence, but with access to opportunities and support that nurture aspirations, as well as the development of personal attributes that foster employability, we all have the capacity to improve our own future. In Clunes, Victoria – a once thriving gold town that has preserved its entrepreneurial spirit and sense of hope – **the transformative power of aspiration, education and personal attributes or soft skills such as flexibility, problem solving and communication were top of mind during a recent, community-wide survey of employability.**

The Study

The Hepburn Skills Store survey was funded by the Victorian Government via ACFE (Adult, Community and Further Education) led by Daylesford Neighbourhood House, and implemented in partnership with Neighbourhood Houses across the shire, including Clunes Neighbourhood House. The survey involved local employers, educators, community and business groups, and industry experts in an exploration of local training needs published in the Hepburn Skills Store, Hepburn Shire report in July 2017. The survey resulted in a further series of one-on-one interviews exploring employment issues and opportunities specific to Clunes. The outcome of these conversations is the Hepburn Skills Store, Clunes report released in August 2017.

What these Clunes conversations uncovered was a willingness and capacity for the town to work together to address endemic issues associated with a population that has lived with long term unemployment for generations – specifically aspirations, education and employability.

Clunes, Victoria

Clunes is a small town with a rich gold history. Clunes early industry and thriving local economy are evident in the streetscapes and historic buildings. However fast forward more than 150 years, and like many regional towns, Clunes has experienced tougher times and is **now ranked as the third lowest socio-economic postcode in Victoria**. With limited economic opportunity comes a range of long term social issues that can spiral, pulling people further away from security and wellbeing.

Reason to believe in the town's ability to bring about positive change

Despite high unemployment and social disadvantage, Clunes has a long history of creating opportunity where it can—many linked to the economic and social benefits of shows, festivals and events. Clunes local agricultural show has been celebrated for well over 150 years, while modern day Clunes annually celebrates the Truck Show, Ceramics Awards, and a diverse range of music festivals. The town's confidence to undertake such events was assisted by Wesley College's early establishment of a Residential Campus in Clunes. Wesley College provided increased employment opportunities, as well as growth for businesses (through their focus on buying local) in a way that is quite unique to a small regional town.

While each of these events are well recognised, it is Clunes' success as the only accredited International Book Town that has provided the greatest economic stimulus for local retailers and accommodation providers. The magnitude of Book Town demonstrates the outcomes possible when a community works together to address big issues, and **contributed to a town culture that values—and knows how to use—it's community assets**.

Since then, Clunes has also benefited from population shifts that have attracted tree changers from the city who have further invested in local opportunities, such as small business. Combined with Clunes higher than average volunteerism rates (at 27 percent against a state average of 18 percent), Clunes' proud agricultural industry, active sporting and arts community and an excellent local primary school, provide the assets necessary to not only improve our own economy and liveability – but also change lives. The question however, is how can we do this?

Aspiration - Hope for the Future

"The greater failure is not the child who doesn't reach for the stars, but the child who has no stars they feel they are reaching for,"
George Brown, British Prime Minister, 2007 – 2010.

Aspiration is defined as the hope or ambition of achieving a goal. Aspiration motivates, providing individuals with a reason to take action, focus on an outcome, and persevere in the face of obstacles. Without aspiration, the self-belief necessary to take charge of our lives is limited, eroding the development of knowledge, skills, attributes and support that might otherwise strengthen us. **This absence of hope or ambition results in uncertainty and lack of confidence in our ability to determine the direction and quality of our own lives.** Without aspiration, education at any level has less meaning, often resulting in lower participation in learning and therefore, fewer employment prospects. **In regional areas, this risk increases as easy proximity to educational opportunities is reduced, and transport, accommodation and affordability issues come into play.**

Located in Dja Dja Wurrung country, 36 kilometres north of Ballarat in Hepburn Shire, Clunes has 1783 residents (at the 2016 census ⁽²⁾). The discovery of gold in Clunes sparked the beginning of the gold rush in Victoria in 1851. At its peak, Clunes was the fifth largest town in Victoria and remains one of the most architecturally intact gold towns in the state.

Based on 2016 Census Data for the 3370 postal area ⁽²⁾ the median age in Clunes is 51 years, with a slightly higher proportion of women than men. 10-14 year olds make up 5.7% of the population and 15-19 year olds make up 5.9% of the population, but that drops to 4.3% at 20-24 years and to 3.4% at 25-29 years. It rises again to 6% at age 40-44 years, indicating a desire for people to live in town, but a need for young people to leave for work or further education.

“Our youth group involves kids from six years of age to 17 years old. We started a year ago and now have more than 30 kids involved in activities every week. It took me a while to work out what was missing with our older kids, but eventually I was able to put my finger on it. They don’t have dreams. None of them. They have school that’s compulsory. For some, if they can’t drop out, then they are just waiting it out. Beyond that there is void. A huge void.” - Clunes Neighbourhood House

“Recently we took the youth group on an excursion less than 30 minutes away. They were all so excited to be going somewhere. It made me realise that just getting out of town and experiencing something different was unusual for some of our kids. It had never occurred to me before this.” - Y3370 Youth Officer, Clunes Neighbourhood House

Education - Knowledge & Experience to Realise the Future

If aspirations for the future create the drive and motivation to work towards goals, then few would argue that learning through formal education at all levels or practical experience assists people achieve their aspirations – both in employment, and where they are seeking to effect change in other parts of their lives.

In August 2013, an Australian report was produced by KPMG for the Regional Policy Advisory Committee in Victoria entitled **Research into Education Aspiration for Regional Victoria.**⁽⁴⁾ This study reviewed nearly one hundred community and institution based learning initiatives in Victoria, seeking to make recommendations for improving participation in learning, and education attainment.

Currently, in regional Victoria young people are 1.5 times less likely to complete secondary school and progress to higher education than their ‘city cousins’. **In Clunes, this statistic is higher, with kids in Clunes three times less likely to graduate High School than children growing up in other Victorian shires.** Clearly this statistic does not bode well for the prospects of our young people, and needs to change.

The Research into Education Aspiration for Regional Victoria study found that multi-faceted approaches to stimulate aspiration and support learning had the greatest impact. Examples included:

- ◆ Programs that opened people’s minds to new ideas and possibilities – particularly at a young age
- ◆ Initiatives that nurtured support and peer networks – particularly those that provided support during transitions such as primary school to high school, high school to higher learning/trades/employment – especially where relocation to bigger populations to access those opportunities was part of the transition

The range of factors influencing educational attainment included:

- ◆ Socio-economic status
- ◆ Personal views regarding the value of education individually, as well as amongst family members, peers and the wider community
- ◆ Schooling experiences and attainment
- ◆ Knowledge of post-secondary school education and career opportunities and;
- ◆ Availability of transition support and assistance

Community involvement/ collaboration was one of the key recommendations for effective initiatives, but the study showed that less than two thirds of the 94 initiatives they reviewed involved community.

While the study didn’t elaborate on the barriers to community collaboration, it’s easy to appreciate the difficulties associated with engaging the community in addressing seemingly endemic issues such as aspiration, education and employability – especially when that community’s socio-economic and geographic characteristic are the primary factors that have led to those problems in the first place.

However, Clunes is different. Clunes has a demonstrated history of isolating problems and leading strategies to address issues in ways that involve diverse cross-sections of the community. This experience combined with existing activities provides a promising foundation for a multi-faceted approach to address aspiration, education and employability in our community.

Clearly opportunities to learn can come in many shapes and forms. **Clunes is fortunate that the town has an exceptional primary education foundation, and existing youth strategies (see existing strategies on following pages) through sports and community on which to build** – all critical success factors necessary to influence educational participation and attainment. **The key it seems, lies in bringing them together to maximise impact.**

Learning for Businesses

Interestingly, the Hepburn Skills Store, Clunes report also highlighted opportunities for learning and development amongst businesses. Less than a third of Clunes businesses engage in training and development. Many of the businesses are owner/operated and the challenges of operating a small business in a rural town often limit access to or time for professional development opportunities.

ABS Statistics⁽⁵⁾ show us that more than half of the small businesses who start up will fail within three years. To avoid becoming an ABS Statistic small businesses need to stay abreast of new issues and opportunities that could increase their productivity, market share or reach, financial management and risk management –just to name a few. **In small communities like Clunes, the economic prosperity of the town is intrinsically linked with the success of local traders and businesses.** Developing aspirations, attaining education and nurturing employability become so much harder if there are no local businesses to drive the local economy, provide work experience or offer jobs.

Studies show that education alone can:

- ♦ increase life expectancy
- ♦ reduce the likelihood of heart disease and risk of diabetes
- ♦ increase a person's economic productivity

Employability - Soft Skills set to Work

Without aspirations or the knowledge and experience that come with learning, it is difficult to develop the personal attributes necessary to enhance employability. Increasingly these soft skills are not only important in life, but also when seeking a job. Indeed, in 2030 two thirds of the vacancies advertised will be soft skill intensive (compared to half today). People with flexibility, good communication skills, problem solving and creativity will be better placed to secure employment irrespective of where they are located, particularly with the increase of flexible work practices and online business models.



Learning team skills

Existing Youth Strategy

Clunes current youth strategy (called Y3370 by the kids) evolved from the town's 2015 Community Plan, Hepburn Shire Council and the aspiration of one teenager. Working with that teenager and a growing group of others, Clunes Neighbourhood House and the Hepburn Shire Council collaborated to provide young people with a place to meet, and a range of youth-led activities to nurture connections and aspiration, particularly involving music, art and informal sporting activities. The majority of activities offered are free. **Where fees apply, sweat equity (or volunteering) options apply for kids so that they can still participate.** For example, fees could be paid by the child by volunteering to produce short videos about their experience, or helping with the pack down of the room after an activity.

In 2016 these kids produced their own CD of original music funded by nearby employer, the RACV Goldfields Resort. Despite many of the teenagers having limited music training, the teenagers were aided by local professional musicians, with the lead singer later performing live at a National Conference at the RACV Goldfields Resort.



The teenagers involved in Y3370 activities start their week with a meal together, and meet to discuss their priorities and focus for the future. Together they've identified a need for improved cooking facilities, requested help with resume writing and over their meal, have begun talking about general news events. Each week there are approximately 30 kids involved in Y3370 activities, with 8 – 10 being teenagers. Many of these children are from low socio-economic backgrounds with a range of complex problems including poverty, mental health, domestic violence, bullying, exposure and risk of drug and alcohol use, poor nutrition and physical fitness... just to name a few. The majority of these teenagers are boys who are not active in formal sports activities offered in the community. The boys regularly express interest in fitness activities such as gym facilities, and often expend their energy working in the Bike Club repairing bikes, or riding on the grounds.

Early in their evolution, the kids involved with Y3370 established their own parameters based on a model provided by Wesley College. The kids identified 3 principles for their group: **respect yourself, respect others and respect your environment.** The kids determined that if people behaved in ways that didn't show respect, then

they would be asked why, and how they could remedy the situation. If kids chose not to remedy the situation in some way, they were asked to leave until they were ready to rectify the problem.

In 2017, youth activities were extended to include drama and cultural studies (in addition to the town's existing sporting activities) for younger children, all with a view to nurturing a greater sense of self, place and aspiration. These activities build on the behavioural and value frameworks set by the local school, encouraging the children to self-regulate when outside of the school environment. The cultural studies



program called Time Turners is an initiative of a local educator, funded and coordinated by the Hepburn Shire Council and Clunes Neighbourhood House. www.timeturners.com.au offers children opportunities to understand the history of their community, and how that shapes their lives today. It also enables kids to imagine the future of the Clunes community, as well as the wider world – and the role they might play in it.

*Each of these activities, combined with the quality of the local Primary School, potential for shared resources and joint activities with Wesley College Residential Campus, Clunes, the resources and infrastructure available via local sporting and arts groups – as well as the support of local council and the health service – **all offer enormous potential for a multi-faceted approach to aspiration, education and employability in Clunes.***

Existing Health Promotion

Since 2016, the Clunes Better Health Project (a Hepburn Health initiative) has sought to enhance the health and wellbeing of Clunes residents through a range of diverse activities focused on physical fitness and nutrition. In 2017 the project has sharpened its focus, seeking to address the underlying issues associated with a lack of confidence and low aspirations. The project is currently working with health professionals including local GPs, educators, community groups and local government to identify collective impact strategies at the grassroots level that can empower people to effect change in their own lives. Aimed at all members of the community, strategies like these engage with other groups such as parents and families, addressing fears that undermine aspirations and nurturing hope.

Existing Work Placement Programs

Since late 2015, Clunes Neighbourhood House has worked with a range of job network providers to coordinate a series of outcomes based programs for unemployed people funded by Work for the Dole. Outcomes have included creation of a park, and beautification of the grounds surrounding the Y3370 activity room, as well as improvement of Bike Club facilities and the community garden. More recently programs have been focused on the transformative nature of art.

Since 2015, Clunes Neighbourhood House volunteer participation rates have significantly increased, with many of those involved in work placement programs becoming volunteers at the end of the project, and continuing to be involved. Significantly, more than half of the volunteers involved with Clunes Neighbourhood House each week are men.

These programs have been assisted by Hepburn Health, who partnered with Clunes Neighbourhood House to provide free transport for participants. During the day, Hepburn Health has enabled the bus to then be used for local residents to buy local or go on 'trips' which have included site visits, op shopping and even a visit to a cemetery to view the grave of a



As is evident through Clunes existing youth and health strategies, in addition to the local primary school and early childhood foundations, there are a diverse range of emerging youth activities **that can be built on to teach soft skills** to age groups up to mid-teen years.

“Within Higher Education, life skills are referred to as soft skills or employability. They cover topics such as culture awareness, communication, team work and problem solving as well as ethics and emotional judgement – and the literacy and numeracy skills that you need in a workplace. They are ‘credentialing’ these skills – with assessment – to improve outcomes for their graduates.” Adviser to the Vice Chancellor, Deakin University.

Their findings indicate that the 18-25 age bracket is too late to pick up many of these employability skills and the focus should be younger children and teenagers.

Job Readiness Programs & Placement Opportunities

Placements were a popular suggestion among the businesses we spoke with. Having a local organisation centrally coordinate placements ⁽¹¹⁾ to take the pressure off businesses, who are time-poor, may lead to more successful outcomes.

Local schools acknowledge that there are gaps in the education that young people receive but that an organisation such as Clunes Neighbourhood House could offer programs to support what they are already doing.

Some suggestions include:

- ◆ Resume writing workshops and interview skills
- ◆ How to present yourself to the wider community
- ◆ Sensible use of social media (thinking about employers accessing information that has been posted online – self-representation online)
- ◆ How to dress and protocols around food, phone use, etc.
- ◆ What any particular job actually entails. Using photographs of real people in real life situations, look at what they’re wearing, think about the personal attributes, behaviours, etc., they need to succeed in their role.
- ◆ Transport is an issue for most young people who can’t drive and don’t have access to public transport. Their employability often depends upon this. Opportunity may exist to expand local L2P programs ⁽¹⁰⁾ or establishment of a local Uber service.

Significantly, in the Hepburn Skills Store, Clunes report poor employability skills were identified by businesses as a real obstacle to employing locally. Despite high unemployment in the community and a willingness by many employers to employ locally, **more than 80% of Clunes businesses indicated that they had difficulty finding staff** citing aspiration, education levels and employability skills as critical gaps amongst employee prospects.

Other examples of opportunities to connect and collaborate

Local universities and schools are currently running programs that are leading to positive outcomes for young people. Such as:

- ◆ Staff and students from the Australian Catholic University visit students at Daylesford Secondary College to talk about the kinds of careers that are available with different qualifications. The aim is to encourage young people to stay within the education system for as long as possible.
- ◆ At Maryborough Education Centre (MEC), lower level students can undertake a Flexible Learning Option (FLO) that helps them to find other methods of learning off campus.
- ◆ MEC’s Year 10 students are connected to the Beacon Foundation. Their motto is ‘no one on the dole’. They help students with ties, deodorant, appropriate dress. They do industry visits and have guest speakers who share insights into what businesses are like. The students get to have lunch with local business leaders.

One of Clunes’ assets is its willingness to explore initiatives that are working well in other communities such as ‘Learning Through Lunch’ run by The Ardoch Youth Foundation ⁽⁹⁾. This sees local Grade 5 students attend a formal lunch experience with Deakin staff. The students practice skills that can be considered essential for participation in community and professional life - ordering off a menu, sharing a meal, meeting new people and practicing the art of conversation. Within Clunes, the Primary School is open to collaboration with Clunes Neighbourhood House, Wesley College Clunes, and a local café to implement a similar experience for their stu-

WHAT DID LOCAL BUSINESSES SAY?

The majority of employers in Clunes are small businesses, with 10 or less employees. Notable exclusions are educators such as the local Primary School, Wesley College Residential Campus, health services and local government. Like the rest of the shire, over 40% of businesses in Clunes are in the Hospitality/Tourism industry. The following is a brief summary of the topics that arose in conversation.

When employing staff

The key message from Clunes businesses is that many young people do not have the skills to be employed. They do not:

- ◆ Understand the nature of work,
- ◆ Can't turn up on time (if at all),
- ◆ Many can't handle money,
- ◆ Can't speak to customers,
- ◆ Are unable to undertake basic tasks such as cleaning,
- ◆ Do not know how to present themselves appropriately,
- ◆ Lack the confidence that is needed when working with the public.



Use of wage subsidy schemes

Half of the businesses we spoke with have used government subsidies, with mixed success. Most are open to trying again.

Staff retention

All local businesses report they are satisfied with their staff retention rate. The owner of the Clunes IGA Supermarket stated: "If they last the first 12 months, they usually last for a while". Few have had to terminate staff, but when they do it has been for theft (2 businesses), lack of personal hygiene, attitude issues or poor performance.

When staff resign, none cite location or travel issues. The key reasons given are to:

- ◆ Retire
- ◆ Have families/ maternity leave
- ◆ Further their career
- ◆ End of contract

Employing local people

Despite difficulties, many businesses were keen to stress their commitment to **employing local young people**, having seen very positive outcomes for some of their employees:

"We've had a few people ... they're very quiet, they're very withdrawn and then six months later ... Ah. Wonderful experience, they have opened up so much... 'Cause you are forced to deal with people."

"[Regarding an employee]...he wasn't very confident, definitely lots of problems talking to people... [Now he has] completely opened up, cracks jokes, serves customers ... Now he's got money and loves coming to work. [Has] confidence in himself. That's been a total change ... I know that eventually, when he gets another job, he's going to be much more confident with himself. Even at the job interview, he wasn't confident at all. I just thought ... [he] just needed that chance to ... turn up."

Employing local people

Most businesses want to employ local people:

"It's important in this job to have a connection to the town. Local knowledge is very important. When we haven't employed local it hasn't worked".

Sometimes businesses find they have confidentiality issues when employing local people yet others see connection to community as a major bonus:

"Confidentiality is a massive thing in all businesses. In particular with schools ... the specific needs of, say for example, our families at risk. ... I would think there's a wonderful need to employ local where we can."

Town-Ready - a Way Forward

Clunes' commitment to addressing aspiration, education and employability issues, particularly for young people, is evident in the range of community-wide initiatives already in place or currently emerging. **However, the conversations with businesses, educators, community and business groups, and industry experts had as part of this Hepburn Skills Store, Clunes report highlight an opportunity to enhance the impact of these initiatives.**

The survey revealed a willingness and opportunity to pull together the many projects in place to form a single, multi-faceted strategy that could ultimately drive economic growth and liveability for Clunes. This strategy could have two primary components:

- ♦ Support for individuals – starting with youth
- ♦ Support for businesses

RECOMMENDATION: Support for Individuals – starting with youth

Three year Youth Employability project including:

- Part-time youth worker
 - Expansion of youth group activities to include cooking, budgeting/managing money, cybersecurity and identity fraud, presentation skills and comportment
 - Linking of existing youth activities across community
 - Town-wide professional development for youth-involving organisations—common language/frameworks
- Annual soft skills program/camp
- Minimum of 4 experience excursions
- Minimum of 4 industry speakers/site visits
- Matching with local life mentors
- Supporting transition to employment or education
- Placement opportunities
 - Local placements with Clunes businesses
 - Placement with businesses and larger organisations across the Shire and beyond

POTENTIAL LEAD: Clunes Neighbourhood House

PARTNERS: Job Network Provider/s, Local Council, Local School, Local Sporting Clubs, Corporate Partners

Funding would be needed for the youth worker, as well as the annual soft skills program/camp. However other activities could be delivered through collaboration with partners and via existing programs such as Y3370.

RECOMMENDATION: Support for Businesses

Both the Hepburn Skills Store, Hepburn Shire report ⁽⁷⁾ and this Clunes report identified the need for diverse and flexible professional development opportunities for local businesses. The business community showed interest in regular business-led seminars, access to new and affordable models of business coaching, as well more flexible access to staff training opportunities via Neighbourhood Houses and other providers (note this was the primary recommendation of the Hepburn Skills Store, Hepburn Shire report). Based on areas of need identified by businesses the business-led series could include:

- ◆ Using new technologies for increased efficiency, market growth and diversification
- ◆ Social media and marketing solutions for small business
- ◆ Collaboration with suppliers and other businesses to increase profitability and market share.
- ◆ Emerging trends including cybersecurity risks and the Internet of Things (IoT)

Other opportunities that would meet identified needs include new and affordable models of business coaching and practical assistance with time saving software such as financial management packages. One potential local partner could be the Clunes Tourist Development Association.

Conclusion

It is clear that Clunes is uniquely placed to develop a highly innovative, multi-faceted community-led approach to issues that can change lives, and enhance the prosperity of our town.

The recommendations identified as part of this report, **bring together a range of existing and potential activities focused on aspiration, education and employment that are town-ready. In particular, with funding and industry support Recommendation One could indeed change lives, providing a benchmark model for this state—as well as the rest of the country.**



Appendix A

Narrative Interviews - Key questions

General

What is your background? Have you worked in a similar role in the past? What inspired you to come to Clunes?

Have you employed staff using any job or wage subsidy scheme (e.g., disability)? Would you in future?

How long do your staff typically work for you? What is the primary reason staff leave your business?

How do you employ staff? Where do you advertise? What challenges do you face employing staff (local staff?)

Mentoring and coaching

Think about coaching as specifically skill-based and mentoring as more general and typically focused on life/job ready-skills.

If you had access to coaching and mentoring for your staff, do you think it could reinforce learnings staff get through training?

If an externally provided coaching and mentoring service was developed within the town, it could work with your organisation, addressing your needs - would you be interested in participating?

What kind of things would you be looking for from it? (eg affordability, discretion, communication, legalities??)

Other

In addition to mentoring and coaching, it is possible that this town might develop or participate in shire-wide activities to improve the employability of young people (18-25). This program might include supervised placement opportunities. Would you consider participating in these programs?

Appendix B

References

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AAG Real Estate

Business Owner

Shareholder, employed for many years

1-3 employees

Clunes Primary School

Principal

Principal, four years in the role

21-50 employees

Creative Clunes

Chair

Has held Chair position almost one year

1-3 paid employees, around 100 volunteers

IGA Supermarket

Business Owner

Owned the business 27 years

11-20 employees

O'Hara's Bakery

Business Owner

Owned business for almost six years

11-20 employees

Pharmacy and Post Office

Business Owner

30 years in business

4-10 employees

Quigley and Clarke Café Restaurant

Business Owner

In operation just a few months

11-20 employees

Clunes Top Shop

Business Owner

Has owned the business three years

4-10 employees

Wesley College Clunes Campus

Head of Campus

Has been at Wesley in Melbourne 20 years and at Clunes for 18 months

21-50 employees

Widow Twankeys Confectionary Emporium and Café

Business Owner

Eight years in operation

4-10 employees

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