

HELPING DRIVE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ... (FROM LEFT) MICHAEL LIDDLE, LAUREN GANLEY AND SARA JOHNSTON



# SHARING KNOWLEDGE

PHOTOS: CHLOE ERLICH



## LAUREN GANLEY

“IT’S IMPORTANT THAT WE RECOGNISE WHAT’S COME BEFORE, AS WELL AS PLAY A ROLE IN DEVELOPING AND SHARING NEW KNOWLEDGE.”

*In the rugged, ancient desert landscape of Central Australia, an innovative and agile organisation is striving to facilitate social and economic development in the region and across borders.*

Desert Knowledge Australia (DKA) is based at the Desert Knowledge Precinct in Alice Springs, a 73-hectare property where organisations with a shared vision are clustered to form an extensive network of desert knowledge.

Although strengthening regional and remote Australia is at the heart of DKA, their work in renewable energy, digital innovation, desert leadership and knowledge sharing has a much broader relevance across Australia and the world.

DKA was established by the NT Government in 2003 in response to the work of the Desert Knowledge Movement, which identified that the physical and socio-economic challenges of the desert require specialised expertise and tailored solutions.

Since then, DKA has become a champion of an untapped resource of great potential: the people and places of regional and remote Australia.

Lauren Ganley, who was appointed chief executive of the independent, not-for-profit statutory organisation in January last year after more than 30 years in senior positions with Telstra, says: “We’re all about collaborating to put knowledge into action, and using that strength to create a real impact.”

With climate change a concern shared by the global community, DKA is involved in several renewable energy projects.

The DKA Solar Centre is the largest

multi-technology solar demonstration facility in the southern hemisphere.

It combines research and development, education opportunities, knowledge generation and sharing, as well as providing electricity for the Desert Knowledge Precinct.

And, in late 2017, DKA launched the Intyalheme Centre for Future Energy – a project with \$5 million seed funding from the Northern Territory Government, aiming to help achieve the goal of powering the NT with 50 percent renewable energy by 2030.

“Clean, cost-effective, sustainable energy is the future, not just for Central Australia or the Northern Territory, but the world,” says Ms Ganley.

DKA advocates using digital innovation as a way to connect across remote Australia. Through developing high-tech co-working spaces, supporting ICT capacity-building, and developing data storage solutions, DKA finds new ways of connecting and doing business.

“While technology makes it possible to do business almost anywhere, parts of the desert are still not connected to phone networks or the internet,” says Ms Ganley.

“Connectivity and access to technology bring opportunity, and access to critical services.”

Remote and regional Australia has a highly mobile population, which can result in a scarcity of corporate skills and knowledge.

DKA helps develop strong governance and organisational practices, and uses its expertise in strategy and facilitation to implement agile, robust solutions.

It also aims to empower existing and emerging Aboriginal leaders, support Aboriginal enterprise and employment, and strengthen

protocols around working with Aboriginal people and organisations.

“This part of the world has real issues around economic disparity and social disadvantage, so we work to connect people to opportunities with the support they need to create change,” says Ms Ganley.

In Central Australia, Aboriginal knowledges and emerging technologies intersect, and create new spaces for innovation.

“It’s important that we recognise what’s come before, as well as play a role in developing and sharing new knowledges,” says Ms Ganley.

DKA provides many opportunities to learn in collaboration with its Precinct partners, the Centre for Appropriate Technology, world-renowned engineers Ekistica, and the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, Australia’s only Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dual sector tertiary education provider.

The Precinct “knowledge experiences” are an example of this – combining STEAM knowhow with Aboriginal culture creates powerful learning for everyone from school students through to corporate groups.

Ms Ganley uses her long experience in private enterprise to build new relationships and generate innovative opportunities that bring a return to the desert.

With so much potential to be developed in Central Australia, she invites private companies to connect with DKA and explore opportunities for social entrepreneurship, cultural immersion, using Central Australia as a test bed for emerging technologies, and working alongside desert knowledge innovators.

“We’re looking for opportunities, not just for ourselves, but for the whole community.”





## MICHAEL LIDDLE

HE HOPES TO BRING ABOUT BROADER POSITIVE CHANGE IN CENTRAL AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITIES, RIPPLING OUT FROM THE MEN HE WORKS WITH.

*Michael Liddle knows that Aboriginal men carry two precious things: pride and a sense of their Aboriginality.*

He believes the two are inextricably linked and is passionate about helping Aboriginal men connect to culture and value their place in their communities.

Mr Liddle is a program manager at DKA, an organisation striving to create a stronger regional and remote Australia through social and economic development.

An Alyawarre man with Arrernte ties, he works with Elders to design and run workshops for Aboriginal men called Codes 4 Life.

Many of the men who attend his workshops have lost their way, referred by Corrections and addiction services.

Mr Liddle got the idea for Codes 4 Life at a football game in 2012; the program uses the rules of football as a prism through which to discuss respect for laws.

“There were a lot of social problems in Alice and not much was being done to change people’s lives.

“I approached the players and told them how smart and proud and fit they looked when they ran onto the oval, how they showed such discipline during the game.

“They knew they had to follow the rules of the game if they wanted to play.

“But what happens when they leave the oval? Everything is thrown out of the window.

“I told the players that the only time they showed any respect for rules was while playing football. Otherwise they showed no respect for Aboriginal or western laws. They don’t listen to their Elders and don’t listen to the police.”

Mr Liddle says society is “courting humongous problems”.

“We’re filling our hospitals, filling our jails, filling our courthouses ... filling everywhere but our schools.

“We’ve got to stop this road from the community to town to the lockup to court to jail to community, and back again. It’s a never-ending revolving door.”

Mr Liddle works with the Elders to show the men at his workshops

how to reconnect with their culture; it creates powerful, emotional moments of self-realisation.

“When these men realise what they’ve lost and the damage that’s been done, they cry, they hug each other.

“A lot of men forget who they are. They forget their Aboriginality, their skin name, their obligations to country. It’s easy for them to get welfare for alcohol and other drugs and neglect their communities, their responsibilities.

“Our kids see this behaviour and it’s creating a generation of people who don’t know who they are. The way we are going, in a few years nobody will understand the importance of their culture and heritage.”

Codes 4 Life reconnects Aboriginal men with their culture and empowers them to make better choices for themselves and their communities.

Mr Liddle hopes to bring about broader positive social change in Central Australian communities, rippling out from the men he works with.

“Aboriginal men have created all these problems and only Aboriginal men can solve them.”

## SARA JOHNSTON

“ALICE SPRINGS IS PERFECTLY SUITED TO DEMONSTRATE WHAT THE FUTURE GRID COULD LOOK LIKE. IT’S SMALL ENOUGH TO MANAGE BUT BIG ENOUGH TO MATTER.”

*Intyalheme is an Arrernte word meaning “a fire starting up again”.*

Renewables engineer Sara Johnston loves the name of the new DKA energy centre and believes it symbolises the rejuvenation of Alice Springs as a future energy hub.

As the manager of the Intyalheme Centre for Future Energy, one of DKA’s major projects, Sara’s job is to develop Intyalheme (pronounced “in-char-lum”) and Alice Springs into a demonstration of innovative practices and new technology.

“Alice Springs is perfectly suited to demonstrate what the future grid could look like,” she says. “It’s small enough to manage but big enough to matter.

“Of course, we’re not starting from scratch – there’s a long history of renewable energy in Alice and a lot of expertise here.”

Intyalheme, which has received \$5 million seed funding from the NT Government, does not carry out research itself but brings together the community, experts and knowledge needed to accelerate the uptake of renewable energy.

“We are an enabler,” says Ms Johnston. “We grow partnerships and facilitate projects that demonstrate how new technology and innovative practices can be applied throughout Australia and beyond.

“Alice is a perfect town to develop new expertise and projects.”



Industry partnerships and collaboration from private companies and government agencies are vital to deliver clean energy to everyone across the NT. Sara and the team at DKA are excited to work alongside Power

and Water Corporation, Ekistica, Charles Darwin University and the NT Government to ensure that the Territory’s energy sector has the expertise and connections that it needs to make renewable energy the priority.