‘Go join that radio station up there’: The role of Australian community radio in journalism education and training

ABSTRACT

Community broadcasting represents the largest independent media sector in Australia, with over 26,000 actively involved volunteers per annum. While people come to community broadcasting at many different points in their life, there is a common, unofficial narrative that describes community radio volunteers ‘cutting their teeth’ in the sector and then ‘moving on’ in their careers. This article details research that interrogates the experiences of journalists and other people working in the creative and cultural industries, who spent significant time in the Australian community broadcasting sector. Employing a collective case study approach, the research explores the role of community radio in journalism education and training.

KEYWORDS

journalism, community radio, community media, journalism education

HEATHER ANDERSON
Griffith University

BRIDGET BACKHAUS
Griffith University

CHARLOTTE BEDFORD
The University of Adelaide

POPPY DE SOUZA
Griffith University
approach, this article identifies and discusses key themes describing the impact of community radio on the employment pathways and career trajectories of its practitioners, with a focus on journalism and media production. These themes provide a framework for further research into the impact of community media on journalists’ employment pathways and career trajectories, viewing community media through a rhizomatic prism.

INTRODUCTION
Community broadcasting represents the largest independent media sector in Australia, with over 26,000 actively involved volunteers per annum (CBAA 2019). However, little is known about their career trajectories. While it is recognized that people come to community broadcasting at many different points in their life – including as part of an active retirement – there is a common, unofficial narrative that describes community radio volunteers ‘cutting their teeth’ in the sector and then ‘moving on’ in their careers. Community media has long been anecdotally considered the ‘training ground’ of the mainstream media, yet there is little evidence to support this. This article details research that interrogates the experiences of journalists (or former journalists) working in the creative and cultural industries (CCIs), who spent significant time in the Australian community broadcasting sector. Through a collective case study approach, this article identifies and discusses key themes describing the impact of community radio on the employment pathways and career trajectories of its practitioners, with a focus on journalism and media production. These themes provide a framework for further research into the impact of community media on journalists’ employment pathways and career trajectories, viewing community media through a rhizomatic prism.

COMMUNITY MEDIA IN AUSTRALIA
Examining the impact of community broadcasting participation on career pathways recognizes the historical role that community radio stations and people have played in shaping the Australian media landscape. Equally, the research inclusion of community ‘media’ acknowledges the challenges and future opportunities for the sector as it continues to adapt and innovate in an increasingly multi-platform ‘post-broadcast’ environment (Dreher 2017). For the purposes of this research project, we have focused on participants whose career pathways included volunteering in community broadcasting, or to be more precise, community radio.

Formally enshrined in legislation in 1978, the Australian community broadcasting sector is one of the most well-established and longest running in the world, an essential part of the country’s media landscape (Anderson et al. 2020). According to the Broadcasting Services Act 1992, Australian community broadcasting services are not-for-profit, are freely available to the general public and must be used for community purposes. Stations are further governed by the Community Radio Broadcasting Codes of Practice which detail policies for programming, operational standards and the sector’s guiding principles.

Radio dominates the Australian community broadcasting sector. The most recent figures from a sector-wide survey commissioned by the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (CBAA) suggest there are more than 450 community radio stations, drawing a listenership of almost 6 million people, or
Community radio also plays a vital service to rural Australians, with 76 per cent of Australian community radio stations located in regional and remote areas, and one-third of these stations reporting that they are the only media outlet producing local programming in their area (McNair yellowSquares 2019).

The sector is largely self-funded and faces significant challenges in terms of financial sustainability: under-funding and lack of resources are chronic problems facing community radio stations (Order 2016; Forde et al. 2002; Price-Davies and Tacchi 2001). Despite struggles for sustainability, the Australian community radio sector has proved remarkably resilient to other challenges. Community radio is said to be under threat in many regions around the world, due to the rise of digital media, podcasting and neo-liberal media policies (Miller 2017; Cammaerts 2009). Yet there are compelling arguments to suggest this is not quite the case in Australia, where community engagement and hyperlocalism remain key strengths of community radio, with programs focused on grassroots community engagement proving resilient to the incursions of digital and commercial media (Anderson and Rodríguez 2019). Research shows community radio continues to play an important role for communities who are ignored by mainstream media, acting as a source of information, social connection and identity, as a site which seeks to intervene in the uneven distribution of value, voice and symbolic power (Fox 2019; Anderson and Bedford 2017; Meadows et al. 2007; Forde et al. 2002).

Further evidence, outlined in the More than Radio report (Social Ventures Australia 2017), is a social return on investment (SROI) analysis of Indigenous broadcasting services which supports the economic case for investment in Indigenous community media, including Indigenous community radio. The SROI analysis found that, for every dollar invested in First Nations media (including broadcasting), $2.87 of cultural, social and economic value is returned, and that Indigenous broadcasting services are crucial to building community resilience, increasing community cohesion and supporting people into meaningful employment. Furthermore, the report found Indigenous broadcasting services provide employment opportunities, technical training and ‘contribute to the development of the Indigenous music and film industry, now recognised on the world stage’ (Social Ventures Australia 2017: 10).

COMMUNITY RADIO AND JOURNALISM

Despite being framed as a ‘training ground’ or ‘foot in the door’, community radio has a strong tradition of journalism in its own right. Community or alternative journalism, much like the community and alternative media outlets themselves, varies significantly across sectors and countries, with even geographically close outlets taking very different approaches (Atton 2009). This has led to the academic literature interpreting community journalism in many different ways, from citizen journalism (Kocic et al. 2021; Bock 2015), to falling within the field of Communication for Development (Tacchi and Kiran 2008; Pavarala and Malik 2007). In search of commonality across community
and alternative journalism practices, Forde (2015: 292) identifies two broad, common traits which are of particular relevance to this research: the disappearance of audience-producer boundaries and a drive to motivate civic conversations and, in some cases, collective action. These common traits form a useful basis for interpreting journalism on community radio in Australia.

The blurring of the lines between producers and audiences is a common theme throughout community radio literature (Meadows 2010). In relation to journalism on community radio, it means that journalists must be constantly interacting with their audiences so as to ensure they are presenting news relevant to their interests (Downing 2001; Atton 2009). These interactions can be interpreted through Bailey et al.’s (2007) seminal theory of community media as rhizome. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) metaphor, community media as rhizome offers a way of understanding how community radio connects various disparate elements of society (Bailey et al. 2007). In this sense, community radio plays a catalysing role in connecting groups, organizations and other communities: ‘the crossroads where people from different types of movements and struggles meet and collaborate’ (Carpentier 2015; Carpentier et al. 2003: 62). In terms of community journalism, Van Vuuren observed the rhizome in practice through the connections that informed broadcast content at one station:

Weather reports are provided by local professional fishermen; a local taxi company gives traffic reports; a market report comes from the Brisbane-based wholesale fruit and vegetable market; and the station broadcasts a job search program with the assistance of employment agencies.

(2001: 15)

This rhizomatic approach to newsgathering represents a challenge to mainstream journalism practices. By drawing from the lived experiences of community members, this approach rejects the notion that institutional and professional authority are the sole sources of credibility and trustworthiness (Atton 2009). Community journalists are deeply embedded within their communities and are in constant contact with their many rhizomatic connections. This closeness and community membership ensures that community journalists are in tune with the issues of importance within their communities, be they fishing condition reports, local politics or social justice struggles.

The second trait of community journalism is that it motivates civic conversations and active citizenship. Arguably, the purpose of all journalism is to equip citizens with the information needed to participate in democratic deliberation and act as ‘guard posts’ of the public sphere (Habermas 1991; Zelizer 2008; McNair 2012). While the public sphere theory is a conceptual resource, the critiques of its bourgeois nature and the requisite ‘bracketing’ of social inequalities have parallels with critiques of the increasing deterriorization, homogeneity and commercialization of the mainstream media (Fraser 1990; Saeed 2009). Atton and Hamilton (2008) go so far as to suggest that alternative journalism, in neo-liberal democracies, is a response to these conditions of capitalism and imperialism as global forces of domination. If alternative journalism is to motivate active citizenship and democratic deliberation under these conditions, it must offer a platform for voices and stories marginalized or excluded in the mainstream media (Downing 2001; Forde 2015). Community radio has a strong track record of bringing marginalized voices to the forefront: from prisoner radio (Anderson and Bedford 2017), to Indigenous groups...
(Meadows 2009; Dahal 2020), people with lived experience of disability (Stewart and Spurgeon 2020), and rural, impoverished populations (Pavarala and Malik 2007; Genilo et al. 2016; Katiyar 2017). In Australia, member stations of the peak body, the CBAA, adhere to codes of practice, one of which (Code 3.6) specifically requires news and current affairs coverage to ‘provide access to views not adequately represented by other broadcasting sectors’ (CBAA 2008: 8). Thus, many community radio journalists in Australia are professionally obligated to actively seek out voices and stories which are silenced in the mainstream media. By providing alternative frames through which to view social realities and creating shared meanings among audience members, community journalism contributes to community building and the broadcast of ‘fictions of collective life’ (Backhaus 2021; Guo 2017; Chaney 1993). By engaging with the mediated stories of marginalized voices, people who may never interact with one another share common experiences and stories, as a form of what Ahmed (2010) refers to as an ‘affective community’. Much like the rhizome discussed earlier, community journalism employs shared fictions of collective life to build solidarity and understanding across disparate elements of society which, in turn, facilitates richer and more nuanced civic discourse.

It is clear from even a synoptic review of the literature that community journalism fulfils an important role in enriching the media landscape and promoting active citizenship. Even where community journalism is seen as a ‘stepping stone’ towards mainstream media employment, the skills and processes acquired as part of this work have the potential to not only crossover but to enhance mainstream journalistic practices.

METHOD

To explore the experiences of community broadcasting volunteers now working in the CCIs, a collective case study approach was employed, with community media destinations treated as an overarching case study, and individual cases – in this context – individual participants, examined in detail. By working to understand each specific circumstance, identifying which factors are unique to each situation and those common to the larger picture, themes can be unearthed which are common across the instances. The case studies were compiled through a multi-method qualitative approach that relied heavily on an in-depth interview with each participant, incorporated with background ‘armchair’ research and personal/professional knowledge of the sector. According to Stake (1995), case study selection should consider how the selected samples represent the population alongside their typicality and their potential to foster a better understanding of the phenomena under examination.

The industry groupings listed by the Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification (ANZSIC) codes in the ABS (2014) report, Australian National Accounts: Cultural and Creative Activity Satellite Accounts, guided the research. To determine which industry categories to focus on, a survey was sent, via email, to 21 staff at the following peak body organizations: First Nations Media Australia, the CBAA, the Community Media Training Organisation (CMTO), Community Broadcasting Fund, National Ethnic and Multicultural Broadcasters’ Council, Australian Community Television Alliance, Technorama, Radio Reading Network, Goolarrri Media and various State-based organizations. A second question in the survey asked for specific suggestions for appropriate people to interview regarding their career trajectory, from which 31 potential interviewees were identified. Given the small scale of this pilot project, a shortlist of six potential
of this purposive sampling was not broad representation, but instead to highlight the range of experiences and industries that former community media workers and volunteers are involved in. We do not claim to draw broad ‘scientific’ claims or findings from this small sample. Rather, we suggest patterns have emerged from this pilot which can be teased into a framework that lays the groundwork for further investigation (Malmqvist et al. 2019; Sampson 2004).

Of the six people interviewed, five were female-identifying and one was male-identifying. Two people from the original sample selection declined to participate and, as such, only one male or male-identifying participant was interviewed. In addition, as the selection process focused on the current status of the participant (i.e., where they were currently based, both geographically and occupation), three participants who started their community radio experience at the same radio station were inadvertently selected. As a result, while the participants’ experiences were richly varied, only three community radio stations are represented in the findings. One participant identified as First Nations. Table 1 provides an overview of the participants’ backgrounds. For the purposes of this article, we draw on findings from interview participants 1, 3, 4 and 5, as the others did not, identify as journalists (the career focus of this article).

FINDINGS

All research participants strongly expressed that participation in community broadcasting was inarguably beneficial to their professional development for a broad range of reasons, which can be divided into the following major themes, discussed below: career pathways, skills development and training, connections and networks, and instilling a sense of social responsibility.

CAREER PATHWAYS

The first thing I say to people when I’m doing journalism training at the university is ‘go and join that radio station up there’, because quite seriously, you won’t get your foot in the door if you want to do media unless you’ve got some experience now, because community radio is the training ground.

( Participant Three)

A key theme that emerged throughout the interviews was the direct and tangible contribution of community broadcasting to career pathways. This research found community broadcasting was perceived to leverage a ‘foot in the door’

Table 1: Overview of participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current profession</th>
<th>Started in CR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1 Works for a national Indigenous owned and operated media outlet</td>
<td>Early 1990s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2 Technology engineer for a major national commercial broadcasting network</td>
<td>Late 2000s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3 Freelance investigative journalist, producer, media lecturer and trainer</td>
<td>Late 1970s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4 Freelance journalist and head of partnerships with a national music education provider.</td>
<td>Early 1980s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5 Manages a visual arts association (however has worked as a journalist previously).</td>
<td>Late 1980s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6 New media artist and designer and project management/CR consultant</td>
<td>Late 2000s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
for emerging journalists and also provide an important space within which to develop the foundational skills and networks that facilitate broader career pathways. All interviewees had diverse, non-linear and somewhat rhizomatic careers.

Participants reported having varying levels of educational and professional experience before becoming involved in community broadcasting, and all four journalist participants said they volunteered while they were undertaking tertiary education, in journalism studies or similar. Now, they either work as freelancers, have simultaneous multiple positions and/or describe themselves as under-employed. The following (truncated) ‘career stories’ of the journalist participants illuminatingly describe a rich and varied history of employment, influenced by involvement in community radio.

Participant One is head of audio and podcasts for a national Indigenous owned and operated media outlet. She also freelances as a journalist. Her broadcasting career began at an Indigenous community radio station, in a capital city, in the early 1990s, where she first volunteered in the newsroom for work experience during her journalism tertiary studies. This led to paid employment at the radio station, where she worked in the newsroom, as a breakfast announcer and a sports announcer for several years. P1 secured a cadetship in public broadcasting where she worked as a broadcaster for nearly twenty years across a range of stations and programs.

Participant Three is a freelance investigative journalist, producer, media lecturer and trainer. Her involvement in community radio began in 1979 while studying communications at university during the early years of a major metro station. Since then, she has worked with media outlets including The Sydney Morning Herald and ABC TV, Radio and Online, and her television and radio documentaries have been broadcast on the BBC, major US networks, and throughout Africa. She’s won a suite of awards including the prestigious Walkley Award for journalism FOUR times!

Participant Four is a freelance journalist and head of partnerships with a national music education provider. She is an award-winning broadcaster, journalist, executive producer and author, with over 30 years’ experience in Australian and international radio, television, online and print. Her work includes an ABC radio series and a book on 1980s’ Australian music, SBS TV talent producer and scriptwriter; commercial television current affairs reporter; and a weekly opinion column for the Saturday Age. A long-term and ongoing community radio broadcaster, she presented her first show in 1983 on a capital city station, and currently presents a show on a regional community station in her hometown.

Participant Five currently manages a visual arts association. Her involvement in community broadcasting began at a major metro community radio station while she was working at a news wire service and studying at university in the late 1980s. From there, P5 worked in commercial radio and at the ABC before transitioning into broadcast and journalism education at a number of institutions across the country. She has maintained a mentoring role in the community broadcasting sector.

A common experience of career progression in community broadcasting among the research participants was the transition from volunteer to paid employment (either at the station or elsewhere). Volunteering was recognized as an important stepping stone, with all participants volunteering in community broadcasting prior to gaining paid employment in the CCIs. The transition from volunteering to paid employment represented, in many cases, evidence...
of community broadcasting offering career development. It was also a marked shift in the development of professional identity.

Another common career pathway among interviewees was the transition from community broadcasting to mainstream media. Community broadcasting was seen as a pathway or a training ground for work in the mainstream media and several interviewees spoke of colleagues ‘going over the road’ with reference to the location of 2SER in Sydney, across the road from the ABC.

Everybody in community radio wanted to get paid more or be regarded as more than […] But for some reason there was a sense that you graduated out of community. That’s how you became professional in the game, and people were always in Sydney terms, trying to go across the road, which was where Ultimo and ABC were.

(Participant Five)

The drive to ‘progress’ from community broadcasting to mainstream media outlets was, however, not universal. Participant One explicitly rejected the assumption that mainstream media was more desirable or professional, arguing that community broadcasting, particularly Indigenous media, has an invaluable role to play.

I think there’s still this feeling that in order to be validated for the skills that you have, you have to work in mainstream. But if mainstream are not providing you a culturally safe environment to be able to do that, or a culturally safe workplace to be able to do that – I’m already seeing colleagues leaving to come back to Indigenous media because they feel safer there, and they feel like […] they can do so.

(Participant One)

This aligns with Meadows et al.’s (2007) observation that, in the case of remote Indigenous broadcasting, there was a hunger for training and employment to work in media organizations within their own sector. Participant One’s insight also highlights the different career pathway experiences of those who do not fall into the dominant normative standards of those working in media and the CCIs more broadly, particularly significant, given the current lack of diversity in Australian newsrooms (Media Diversity Australia 2020).

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING

It’s like everything you know, like, everything that I do is grounded in that. I learned how to research. I learned how to write. I learned how to produce […] All of those skills were developed in community media.

(Participant Three)

Participants all agreed their time in community broadcasting developed (and for those still in the sector, continues to develop) a broad suite of skills, which prepared them for future employment. In a study of journalism, media and communications graduates, Bridgstock and Cunningham (2014: 236) found those employed as specialist creatives reported a high relevancy of the skills they acquired through their courses, including discipline-specific knowledge. However, they also found that embedded creatives ‘were more likely than specialists to talk about the importance of verbal communication and interpersonal skills, particularly interdisciplinary communication skills and team management skills’ (Bridgstock and
Cunningham 2014: 236). It is evident participation in community radio provides opportunities to develop both hard and soft skill sets, many of which can be classified as transferable and creative in nature. The specific skills developed through community media, as cited by participants in this research, included production skills, such as programming, audio mixing and digital editing, outside broadcasting, presenting and panelling; journalism-specific skills, including storytelling, interviewing, researching, covering large events, and ‘producing quality journalism’; and managerial and other generic skills, for example, grant writing, managing volunteers, risk assessments, policy knowledge, conflict resolution, administration, time management, communication skills, multi-tasking, teaching and training.

Participants reported that skills acquisition in the community radio environment occurred both formally and informally, and predominantly through practical, hands-on activity. Community radio was seen to provide opportunities to learn new skills under a variety of conditions, and this was integral to professional and personal development. Informal training was highly valued by the participants, who described it as providing the opportunities to learn new skills on-the-job using trial and error, with the freedom to learn from mistakes in safe (including culturally-safe) environments. Participants mentioned finding themselves in ‘sink or swim’ situations working outside their comfort zones and in areas they did not expect or think it possible for them to succeed in. The fluid and contingent nature of much of this informal training, again, highlights the rhizomatic nature of community broadcasting.

Formal training certainly was not foremost in the minds and memories of the case study sample. This may be influenced by the era during which the participants cut their teeth on community broadcasting, before the CMTO and similar training bodies had been established. More recent community broadcasters may report a differing experience. However, participants did refer to some formal in-house training at their radio station which included Australian Association Press news-wire training, inductions and announcer training. This aligns with previous research into the community radio sector – conducted almost two decades ago – where Forde et al. (2002: 63) found that essentially all of the stations surveyed conducted some form of training, whether informal, formal, or a combination of both, investing considerable time, resources and expertise into these activities.

Participants also said they applied formal training they gained from their tertiary studies in journalism, which were concurrent to their community radio commitments. However, they all credited the training they received in the community broadcasting sector for being ‘ahead of the game’, particularly when it came to using digital technologies ahead of other broadcasting sectors. Participants praised their experience in community radio news and current affairs production, and described the sector as a training ground for journalism which is an almost vital precursor for a successful broadcasting career.

It gave me such a great grounding […] just always felt that I was way ahead of where I needed to be, because of what I’d been given at [CR station] in terms of the training and in terms of what I got to do […] when I got put into a situation that was challenging or something completely different for me (at their new job), it didn’t phase me because I’d already kind of done that in community radio.

(Participant One)

Finally, it is also worth noting all of the participants were clearly passionate and positive about their experiences in community broadcasting with many
using the word ‘love’ to describe their feelings towards community radio and their ‘craft’, be that storytelling, promoting local music, journalism and/or the technologies themselves. This pattern of passion for community broadcasting should not be dismissed. The majority of participants still volunteer in the sector, and report that maintaining their involvement in community radio was a form of ongoing professional development, particularly because of its innovative nature. This extended to keeping them connected to ‘what’s happening’ in the community, both locally and through the lens of a community of interest, in ways that other media could not achieve.

I’m still part of it, I do summer fills, and so in terms of informing my professional development […] that ability to come in and out of community broadcasting around my professional work has enabled me to stay connected to developing ideas and concepts in shows.

(Participant Four)

Ongoing connections, with no clear beginning or end, are characteristic of a rhizome (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) and this research confirms community broadcasters tend to stay connected with the sector even after moving to other careers. As such, the opportunities for lifelong learning through community radio extend well beyond initial involvement.

CONNECTIONS AND NETWORKS

So when I left the country and came to Sydney, I didn’t know anyone. No one was going to help me get a job. [Community radio station] gave me a network of people who had some influence who were prepared to recommend me […] I wouldn’t have got ABC […] without that, I wouldn’t have been able to teach at a university.

(Participant Five)

Extending on the metaphor of community media as rhizome, connections and networks are fundamental (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). The recent Culture and Related Industries IRC’s Skills Forecast (Skills Service Organisation 2019: 19) highlighted the importance for new entrants into the CCIs to develop transferrable skills around communication, networking and relationship-building. For all of the research participants, community radio involvement was central to providing the space to build and strengthen the networks and connections which have shaped their personal and professional pathways. Participants described the development of their practice as interdependent with the people, connections and networks made through community radio involvement. They discussed community radio networks as central to career progression, crucial for discovering and leveraging new opportunities.

Importantly, participants highlighted the role of peers who recommended work opportunities or encouraged them to apply for jobs. All named colleagues who had inspired and supported them throughout their careers and displayed an obvious pride in the achievements of their peers. For most, professional networks were described interdependently with long-term personal friendships.

That was actually really important for forging incredible friendships as well. That lasted that still, we still maintain that lasted forever and will last forever.

(Participant Three)
Whilst there is no single agreed-upon definition, social cohesion can be thought of as the bond or glue that binds people together through a shared sense of community. Social cohesion refers to both individual level behaviors and attitudes such as volunteerism and participation, or through group level “conditions” and outcomes such as evidence of supportive networks and social solidarity (Friedkin 2004: 410). This focus on social values, support and solidarity was reflected in each of the interviews, and illustrated by Participant Four’s account of the enduring nature of intersecting community radio and social justice networks throughout a varied career:

But it was fundamental to, you know, shaping everything else. And so, yeah, JJJ wouldn’t have happened if it wasn’t for [community radio station]. And then later on in my career […] built an incredible network of people who are still really important in my personal and professional life […] So it is fundamental to who I am. I have a very profound belief in and commitment to community radio.

(Participant Four)

Order (2017b: 2) notes a shift in policy focus from ‘social inclusion’ to ‘social cohesion’ over the last decade. Community radio, and community media more broadly, is widely recognized as contributing to social cohesion. Sector-based research in Australia repeatedly highlights community radio’s positive role in this regard (Lewis 2008; Forde et al. 2002) and as a cultural resource ‘contributing to social gain’ (Meadows and Foxwell-Norton 2011: 98). Research has also found community radio can contribute to countering loneliness and isolation, facilitating social connection and enhancing social cohesion (Order 2017a, 2017b). It is a site for both community radio volunteers and their listeners to connect to a station community (Order 2017b: 12). It must also be noted that overall, much of this research is interested in community media audiences and listener engagement, rather than the experiences of community media practitioners or station workers (whether volunteer or paid).

However, in her research, Fox found that for some community radio volunteers at 3CR, ‘unity and cohesion within the on-air community is akin to a solidarity movement’ (2019: 115), through and across the airwaves. While this is not discussed in terms of social cohesion per se, she argues social connections are forged through on-air and off-air relationships, and can feed into larger solidarity struggles and grassroots organization.

This theme was reflected in each of the participant interviews, with community radio described as playing a formative role in developing the personal friendships, creative networks and social values which have shaped professional pathways. Here we see community media proactively instilling the values of community connection which are an integral characteristic of high-quality community and alternative journalism practice, as discussed previously. Community radio fosters (and models) the value of interconnectedness and support which underpins alternative newsgathering and storytelling approaches. The influence of the community broadcasting ethos in developing emerging journalists and content producers is further explored in our final theme.

INSTILLING A SENSE OF SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

I probably landed the best job in the world at that time, I was pretty determined to get there. But I also was really driven by this sense […]
that community radio had sort of instilled this incredible sense of the power of music and the power of great journalism too […] my association with the role of community broadcasting and community media was really about giving voice and a platform to people who would otherwise not have that voice.

(Participant Four)

The passion felt by participants for community radio, especially in relation to the sector’s commitment to social justice, represents a less tangible, yet (we argue) equally important theme emerging from the case studies. All of the journalist participants said their involvement in community radio fostered a deep sense of social justice and community.

This also connects to debates around ‘cultural value’ which have been a prominent feature of policy and scholarly debates around the CCIs more broadly. Belfiore (2012) argues, the United Kingdom’s New Labour’s cultural policies and their justification of arts and culture based on social and economic impact fail to elaborate a positive or more sophisticated notion of cultural value beyond appeals to their ‘intrinsic’ and ‘instrumental’ values (not to mention ‘institutional’ values) (see also O’Connor 2015). Belfiore adds that this ‘effectively obscures, and thus shelters from scrutiny, power imbalances, unequal distribution of cultural authority in society, and unequal access to the means of symbolic representation and meaning-making’ (2020: 384). If we consider what this might mean for the community media sector – a sector which, at the grassroots level, shares many of the qualities and values of community-based and participatory arts sector which Belfiore primarily addresses – we can get a sense of what is at stake.

It is beyond the purview of this article to claim evidence that community radio successfully addressed the inequalities Belfiore, and others, express concern for. However, there is a clear connection between engagement in community media and interest and issues of social justice. Because of their involvement in community broadcasting, participants said they were exposed to a wide range of opinions, ideas, and perspectives, and provided opportunities to learn more about the world and generally become more socially aware and politically active.

But see that all comes back to community radio, (what) I understood because of the work that I’ve done at [the community radio station]. I understood how important radio was in a country like South Africa, for so many things. For education […] All that sort of stuff could be done through community media, through community radio.

(Participant Three)

For one participant, their understanding of the value of community broadcasting equipped them to accept a job offer, where they worked in South Africa for four years, on a project establishing community radio stations around the country and providing training for journalists and other broadcasters. For another, it was through her community radio station that she learned about local Indigenous communities and their histories, which was extremely important to them, as a First Nations person relocated to another part of the country.

I’d grown up in a very small mining town […] and then moved to Brisbane. So it wasn’t necessarily my community […] it was a really
interesting time of just learning about the history of the place, learning about the history of Brisbane and Indigenous people. (Participant One)

Community media is a space that attracts people who want to promote a wide range of social justice issues and there are clear associations between community radio in Australia and themes of social justice (Anderson et al. 2020). As already highlighted, community media and alternative journalism are defined vis-à-vis their capacity to assist audiences to develop a critical world-view, encourage civic participation and fill the gaps left by mainstream reportage (Downing 2000; Forde 2015). If community media is a site which seeks to intervene in the uneven distribution of value, voice and symbolic power (clear tenets of social justice), how might this translate when people shift ‘out’ into other media outlets, spaces which may not be accessible or participatory in the same way? This research project, albeit small, clearly demonstrates community radio has the capacity to expose people to social justice issues in ways that resonate and remain with them regardless of their career trajectories. Such positive and enduring exposure to the importance of social justice has influenced and informed participants’ lives, both professionally and personally.

A FRAMEWORK FOR MAPPING CAREER IMPACT

It is clear the Australian community media sector has the potential to play an important and multi-faceted role in the professional development of its practitioners, especially for aspiring journalists. Based on this pilot study, four key themes have emerged which provide a framework for further research into the impact of community media on journalists’ employment pathways and career trajectories, viewing community media through a rhizomatic prism. A metaphor of the rhizome focuses attention on the connective, fluid and contingent characteristics of community media, and, in particular, journalism and other content production, within it.

Firstly, we can examine the specific ways in which a community radio volunteer moves into paid employment, either within the community sector or elsewhere. It is important to recognize the fluid career trajectories of community media workers (volunteer and paid), which are clearly rhizomatic. Careers have traditionally been conceptualized as a linear progression, bounded by occupation and advanced by employing organizations. The nature of work, however, has undergone radical changes, with the notion of a ‘job for life’ replaced by multidirectional careers, non-linear pathways, precarity, multiple employers and a variety of working arrangements (Crawford et al. 2013). Secondly, attention must be paid to skills development and training which occurs both informally and formally within the community media sector and the ways in which those skills – including those designated as ‘soft’ – benefit future ventures (in employment and otherwise). Much of this training is ad hoc, fluid and contingent in nature. Furthermore, we should not ignore the passion that community broadcasters have for their craft, the lifelong connections many have to the sector and the role this plays in professional development. Thirdly, we can consider how networks and connections, established through a volunteer’s time through the rhizome of community media, produce lifelong opportunities and foster professional development. Finally, we should include a focus on the role played by community radio in inculcating social
justice values which influence community radio volunteers’ attitudes towards both employment and lifestyle choices.

Through this pilot study, we were able to identify gaps in our recruitment approach. A noteworthy finding was that no one from the sample had (or reported to have) participated in formal training through the CMTO. This may be due to the eras during which the participants were first involved in the sector and we suggest more recent community broadcasters may report a differing experience. An extension of this research is underway to investigate, explicitly, the employment pathways of graduates of CMTO courses, and other formalized training within the sector.

In addition, this article was informed by the experiences of four people who worked in community radio, as volunteers and as employed staff, and then moved to employment as journalists. Supporting data from interviews with two other community radio practitioners working elsewhere at the CCIs were also incorporated. Only three community radio stations were represented in the findings, all of which were based in large capital cities. While attempts were made to select a diverse range of participants, this was limited; the majority of participants in this research are white, none are non-binary, and none (bar one) have accents that are designated as non-white or overtly connected to disability. From this pilot, we have proposed a framework for future research and recognize a larger participant pool is required to test its validity.

REFERENCES
“Go join that radio station up there”


Meadows, M. and Foxwell, K. (2011), ‘Community broadcasting and mental health: The role of local radio and television in enhancing emotional and...


SUGGESTED CITATION
Anderson, Heather, Backhaus, Bridget, Bedford, Charlotte and de Souza, Poppy De (2022), “‘Go join that radio station up there’: The role of Australian community radio in journalism education and training’, Australian Journalism Review, 44:2, pp. 171–89, https://doi.org/10.1386/ajr_00102_1

CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS
Dr Heather Anderson is a senior lecturer in journalism and communications in the School of Humanities, Languages and Social Science at Griffith University, Australia, and a member of the Griffith Centre for Social and Cultural Research. She is a media studies and journalism scholar who investigates the ways media can be used to promote social justice, specializing in prisoner radio and community media action research. Her book, *Raising the Civil Dead: Prisoners and Community Radio*, was published in 2012 through Peter Lang. She has been a community radio practitioner since the early 1990s and currently volunteers at Meanjin (Brisbane) radio station, 4ZZZ.

Contact: School of Humanities, Languages and Social Science, Griffith University Nathan Campus, 170 Kessels Road, Nathan, QLD 4111, Australia. E-mail: h.anderson@griffith.edu.au

https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4530-1435

Dr Bridget Backhaus is a lecturer in journalism and communications in the School of Humanities, Languages and Social Science at Griffith University, Australia. A former community radio journalist and producer, her research explores the role of community media in social and environmental change with particular focus on issues of voice, listening, identity, and participation. Her work employs critical and participatory methodologies to explore the impacts and interconnections of community radio. She is a member of the Griffith Centre for Social and Cultural Research and holds a Ph.D. from Loughborough University, London. She is the author of *Polyphony: Listening to the Listeners of Community Radio* (Routledge, 2021).

Contact: School of Humanities, Languages and Social Science, Griffith University Nathan Campus, 170 Kessels Road, Nathan, QLD 4111, Australia. E-mail: b.backhaus@griffith.edu.au

https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8244-2237

Dr Charlotte Bedford is a visiting researcher, specializing in radio and social change, at The University of Adelaide, Australia. In the United Kingdom and Australia, she has developed and delivered media projects alongside marginalized communities for three decades. She is an ongoing community radio volunteer and trainer with long-term involvement with the South Australian Community Broadcasting Association and is project manager (leadership and enterprise) with the national Community Media Training Organisation. She published her first book, *Making Waves Behind Bars: The Prison Radio Association*, in 2018 with Bristol University Press.

Contact: The University of Adelaide, North Terrace, Adelaide, South Australia 5005, Australia.
Dr Poppy de Souza is an interdisciplinary researcher affiliated with Griffith University in Brisbane, Australia, and UNSW Sydney, Australia. Her research critically examines the politics of voice and listening in conditions of injustice and inequality, focusing on sites and practices of struggle and transformation; the relationship between sound, race and earwitnessing; and political listening in response to media activism and mediated accounts of racial-colonial harm, indefinite detention, carceral violence and racialized border regimes. Before coming to academia, she worked in community-based arts settings as a digital storytelling facilitator, and with cultural institutions as an educational writer and curator, including with the National Film and Sound Archive, Australia.

Contact: Griffith Centre for Social and Cultural Research, Griffith University Nathan Campus, 170 Kessels Road, Nathan, QLD 4111, Australia.
E-mail: poppy.desouza@griffith.edu.au

https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4958-9146

Heather Anderson, Bridget Backhaus, Charlotte Bedford and Poppy de Souza have asserted their right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as the authors of this work in the format that was submitted to Intellect Ltd.