



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
VICTORIA

THE PINNACLE FOUNDATION RECEPTION
Wednesday 26 May 2021

Paul Zahra, Chair and **Board Members**, Pinnacle Foundation

Andrew Staite, CEO

Ro Allen, Victorian Commissioner for LGBTIQ+ Communities, Victoria Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commissioner-Designate and Pinnacle Foundation Ambassador

Distinguished guests

First, I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land upon which we are gathering and pay my respects to their Elders past and present and to any Elders here with us.

I am delighted to welcome the Pinnacle Foundation to Government House this evening or – more aptly – to welcome you back.

When we started in this role, almost six years ago now, we inherited the patronage of many wonderful organisations that contribute so much to the fabric of life in our State.

The Pinnacle Foundation was one that I took on early in my time, because we so believed in the need for practical support and guidance for young members of the LGBTIQ+ communities.

Since we first hosted an event here for Pinnacle in 2016, our nation has witnessed an historic moment with the ‘YES’ vote in favour of marriage equality.

I think we have also seen an expanding community understanding of sexuality, gender fluidity and diversity.

We have many of you in this room to thank on both counts.

Although in an ideal world, such progress would mean that Pinnacle is no longer needed, we know that – unfortunately – it is not the case. There is still much work to be done.

Many of you in this room know that only too well.

You know of the psychological distress directly related to experiences of stigma, prejudice, discrimination, bullying and abuse. And of the accompanying increase in difficulties when it comes to completing education and pursuing life goals.

The Pinnacle model, supporting young people through education and mentorship, is thoughtful, and has proven its success many times over.

We have enjoyed watching Pinnacle grow and expand its reach. That you have awarded 51 scholarships this year – a record – despite the challenges of COVID, is an impressive achievement of which you should be proud.

Life experience, but particularly our past careers in the courts, persuade us of the inestimable benefits of a good education, but the importance too of good role models, a support network and a sense of belonging.

In providing those benefits, the Pinnacle Foundation is making a marked difference to the lives of your scholars.

There is impressive data to support the impact you are having. A massive 95% of your scholars say how well they feel supported by you.

We have seen the impact first-hand. Several of the scholars we met here in 2016, we welcomed again in 2018, when we hosted a reception for the Duke and Duchess of Sussex. It was a joy to watch the social confidence and competence of the Pinnacle scholars in that setting.

We are pleased for the opportunity this evening to thank everyone involved at the Pinnacle Foundation for all that you do.

Thank you to Chair, Paul Zahra and to all the Foundation Board members, and to your hard-working staff.

Thank you to the donors, corporate partners and ambassadors who provide essential financial and moral support to the Foundation.

A particular thanks to the volunteers, the wonderful mentors, who so generously donate not only their time and expertise, but their personal stories and perspectives as well.

Above all, thank you and congratulations to this year's scholars. You have put yourselves forward. You have secured a scholarship: a significant achievement! And, like those who've gone before you, if you can embrace every aspect of this opportunity, you can stand tall and proud with the world at your feet.

In combination, all of you make our community stronger and better.

So, please relax and enjoy your time here at Government House and we look forward to meeting with you shortly.