

ANNUAL REPORT

2021



Country
Universities
Centre
FAR WEST

**Our mission is to
increase aspirations
and access to higher
education through a
connected learning
community and
overcome the barriers
to success**



2021 Annual Report

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Message from the Chair

Michael Williams

Relentless, exhausting, and disruptive are words often used to describe this past year, our headlines have been filled with the growing or declining number of COVID cases, vaccination updates, new rules, and health orders.

Many have not seen their families and friends for extended periods as the pandemic has impacted every aspect of our lives. For our students the reality of study continues, further highlighting the extraordinary achievements of so many students in the Far West NSW region, many of whom are raising their families, home schooling their children, working from home, living with our normal daily pressures, and still striving for their personal education and career outcomes.

The same disruptions and difficulties have obviously impacted Country Universities Centre Far West, but the team have again extended their support services in very trying circumstances to ensure local students were well placed and able to continue their studies with minimal disruptions.

As the type of support required by students shifted with their circumstances the operational team accepted the challenge and developed alternate support models to accommodate student needs, ensuring minimal disruption and enabling students to remain focused on their study outcomes. The combined efforts of the operational team have again exceeded reasonable expectations as they moved quickly to meet students' needs and once again student satisfaction results reflect the outstanding achievements of the team.

An easing of restrictions in April 2021 allowed the focus to shift to the graduating students with CUC Far West's first graduation ceremony presenting a visual demonstration of the commitment of students and the purpose of the Centre. Country Universities Centre Far West was established to create opportunity, support the aspirational development of our community, and ensure the people of Far West NSW had an opportunity to undertake tertiary education and remain at home in their community with the support of family and friends. Our most recent student survey indicates 94% of students believe CUC Far West has made it easier for them to stay, study and work in their community, a clear indication that creating the opportunity is



providing community wide benefits that will support the workforce needs of our region into the future.

The past 12 months have seen the Board focused on stronger strategic planning to guide the Centre over the coming years and enhancing our strategic Governance to ensure the Far West Centre is well placed to meet future needs. We also continue to strengthen our capabilities to support our vision by developing the skills and capacity of Board members and implementing systems that support our direction.

As student numbers continue to grow and the support services mature to meet current and future needs the Board will continue to investigate opportunities to increase the physical footprint of the Centre, ensuring the available space and resources to meet future demand.

The support of local businesses cannot be understated and the ongoing support from Regional Development Australia Far West and the Broken Hill Community Credit Union remain critical to the sustainability and advancement of the Centre.

As the Centre continues to develop and diversify to meet the needs of our communities our CUC Far West team continue to flourish and demonstrate the initiative and commitment that is critical to success. As always, our greatest assets are our people and I would like to recognise the incredible team that continue to strive for excellence, develop new strategies and display a genuine care for every student that walks into the Centre. I offer my wholehearted gratitude, their combined resilience, dedication, passion, and creativity has been inspirational.

CUC Far West proudly serves the needs of the Far West NSW region, this will always be our core purpose. We will continue to support the educational needs of our communities, inspire our younger generations, and meet the challenges and opportunities of tomorrow.

As we look forward to the next year and an increasing return to pre pandemic life we know it rests on our shoulders to play or part in the social and economic recovery of the Far West NSW region. I have confidence CUC Far West is in a strong position to contribute to the recovery and continue to deliver our mission.

Michael Williams

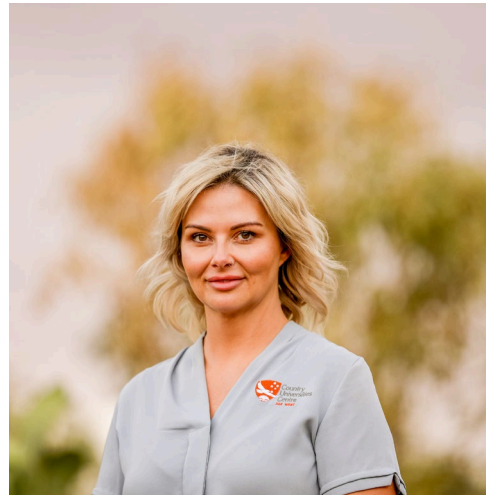
Chair, CUC Far West Board of Directors



Centre Manager Report

Danielle Keenan

Entering our fourth year of operations, CUC Far West remained focused on its mission to increase aspirations and access to higher education through innovation, resourcefulness, and collaboration. Despite the challenges presented by the escalating COVID-19 restrictions, the Centre has continued to experience growth in student registrations, well over KPIs set by key partners. In Semester II, 2020 more than 200 students accessed the facilities and supports, with a growing 470 students registered since our official opening in 2018.



In response to the pressures experienced by our community and within the Higher Education sector due to the effects of the pandemic, our outstanding staff have worked tirelessly to ensure adverse impacts to students learning, and engagement was minimised. I am incredibly proud of the tenacity shown by staff and students who supported each other and displayed values of connection, inclusivity and creativity.

In addition, the ability to meet our students where they are in their learning journey is a vital component of the CUC Far West student support model. Fundamental to our achievements in assisting students to succeed is the Learning Skills Advisor program, which has demonstrated continued outstanding outcomes. Our students highly value the program, evident by the continuous anecdotes of success they share and through the significant growth in demand from students wanting one-on-one time with our excellent team of LSAs.

Furthermore, a key focus this year has been enhancing our connection with local high schools working in collaboration to develop and deliver programs that promote aspiration building and transferable skills across industry, employment and education.

Lastly, CUC Far West board and staff continue to work hard to empower local people to achieve their education and career goals without leaving home. Over 30 students have graduated from their respective courses, with the majority gaining local employment and/or continuing their learning journey into postgraduate education. I want to emphasise the achievements of our students and their momentous accomplishments. We have been honoured to celebrate and contribute to this journey.

Danielle Keenan

Centre Manager, CUC Far West



Our Story

Our History

CUC Far West officially opened in May 2018 as an affiliate of Country Universities Centre, with support from the NSW Government, Broken Hill Community Credit Union and Regional Development Australia Far West. In late 2018 we were successful in obtaining Federal funding to deepen our operations and engagement under the Regional University Centres program. Since opening, we have supported more than 480 Far West students in their learning journeys, and we look forward to being part of the future of higher education for the Far West region.

What we do

CUC Far West is a dedicated learning and study space where students can focus entirely on their studies. Students can connect with like-minded people and engage in a learning community while they study locally in the Far West NSW. We are focused on assisting students settle into study, improve their academic skills and ensure they have the tools to succeed in higher education.

Who we are

We are driving change in regional education by empowering the Far West community to fulfil their potential through higher education. We are increasing access by providing a highly connected learning community in Broken Hill to overcome the barriers to success.

Why we are here

Regional and rural communities deserve quality opportunities to pursue their dreams without the need to relocate. Our mission is to provide regional people with the space and tools they need to create a vibrant and more prosperous future for themselves and their wider community.

Partners

Essential to the success of the CUC Far West has been the support of our partners, including the Commonwealth Government, NSW State Government, university partners, local government and community partners.

Government and Community

NSW Government

The NSW Government has supported the CUC through two funding grants totalling \$16 million, which facilitated its successful expansion. The NSW Government's Higher Education Strategy focuses on increasing participation in higher education, CUC Far West is proud to assist the government to achieve this by supporting people in our region to pursue higher education in their local community.



The Australian Government

The Australian Government is investing more than \$74 million to assist in the establishment and operation of community-owned, Regional University Centres at sites across regional Australia. CUC Far West is a successful recipient of the Commonwealth's Regional University Centres Program and gratefully acknowledges the support received to date.



Australian Government
**Department of Education,
Skills and Employment**

Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation

CUC Far West acknowledges and thanks the Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation (VFFF) for its support. Funding has been used alongside local Centre funds to support our successful Learning Skills Advisor to support CUC students.



Country Education Foundation

Country Education Foundation (CEF) and CUC collaborate to create and promote opportunities for regional students in areas of education, increasing aspirations, and community engagement.



Foundation for Regional Rural and Renewal (FRRR)

The FRRR is supporting the CUC through its not-for-profit fundraising account.



University Partners

The CUC has formal partnerships with the following universities to support current students studying at the CUC:

CQUniversity

The CUC and CQUniversity have a shared mission in supporting regional students to succeed, irrespective of where they live, with the university providing place-based focused support for Bachelor of Education students who study at the CUC.

University of New England (UNE)

As Australia's oldest provider of distance and online education, the expertise of UNE has been highly valued by the CUC. Sharing of knowledge between UNE Support Staff, CUC Centre Managers and LSAs has provided a valuable resource for CUC students and developed an enhanced understanding of the challenges online regional students face.

Charles Sturt University (CSU)

In a collaboration between industry, community and university, the CUC is offering content specialised tutoring to assist CSU Bachelor of Nursing students registered with a CUC. The tutoring style is student-led, with students given the agency and flexibility to work with the tutor on the challenges they face in their personal learning.

Federation University

This partnership provides the framework for future collaborations to share knowledge, expertise, and support students across the CUC network.

University of Southern Queensland (USQ)

The CUC and USQ have begun exploring ways to partner together to allow students to have broad access, choice, and flexibility in their higher education pursuits.

Community Partners

Broken Hill Community Credit Union

The Broken Hill Community Credit Union is a community-owned financial institution that has been part of the Broken Hill landscape for 40 years. With total assets of approximately \$60 million, a strong liquidity position and an excellent capital base, Broken Hill Community Credit Union is a positive and co-operative community partner. The Broken Hill Community Credit Union provided the initial funds to undertake a significant refurbishment of the CUC Far West building including project management, construction and fit out. The Broken Hill Community Credit Union's contribution made the redevelopment of the Centre possible and they continue to provide ongoing support through reduced market rate rent, financial guidance and support.

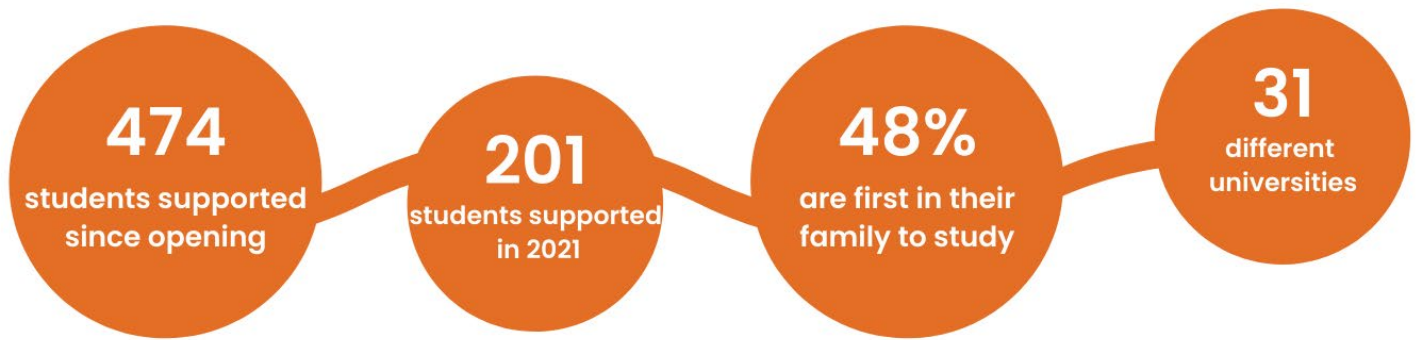


Regional Development Australia Far West NSW

Regional Development Australia Far West (RDA Far West) led the development of steering groups, community consultation and funding application development during the concept and establishment phase. RDA Far West provide ongoing consultancy support and expertise to ensure the Centre develops strong governance systems and operational processes. RDA Far West is working with the Centre to develop a comprehensive Governance System and provide consultancy support as and when required.



Semester 1, 2021



77% female



50% students are over the age of 25

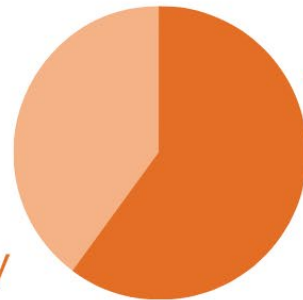


49% study full time



8% Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage

51% study part time



Top Areas of Study



Health **33%**



Education **14%**



Psychology, Social Work & Community Service **16%**

Student Support

CUC Far West provides wrap around support for any student who is studying online or in blended modes at any Australian university and compliments the support that each student's university already offers. This support includes access to a local learning community, in addition to well-being, technology, administrative, and academic support.

In addition to being regional, many CUC students are often their first-in-family to attend university, are non-school leavers, have had a break from education, are balancing fulltime work with study, have caring responsibilities, or a combination of these factors. These factors influence every student differently and can combine to create unique challenges for each student to succeed in higher education. To support these students, the CUC meets students where they are' and delivers face-to-face support that is tailored to the needs of each individual student.

The focus on face-to-face support provided by CUC staff is highly valued by students. In the 2021 Student Experience Survey, 95% of students indicated they are more likely to continue with their studies as a result of the help they received from the CUC, while 90% of CUC students experienced a sense of belonging to the CUC, and 100% of students found the staff to be very or extremely helpful.



Before CUC Far West, the barriers to success were many. The supported environment, the encouragement and mutual understanding from staff and students all there with one goal is the third leg in the tripod to making it



I feel so grateful as I believe CUCFW had a big part in allowing me to pass the GAMSAT exam successfully. I hope people studying in the community understand what is available at this centre. It reflects the spirit I found in Broken Hill- inclusive, driven, caring, supportive with a huge heart

Research and Source An

The Next Steps



2021 Year in Review

CUC Far West aims to provide opportunity, access and support for students to be able to study in their home community enabling the regional communities of Far West to retain higher proportions of young people and skilled professional workers. The CUC works to foster a local learning community for students where they can develop peer support networks and engage with other university students. This is particularly important for first in family student, who may not have access to additional support within their existing family networks. Additionally, the development of a local learning community helps normalise higher education within the community, and nurtures aspirations for others to consider a higher education pathway.

CUC Student Experience Survey

The CUC Student Experience Survey is a network-wide survey tool that is used to ensure the CUC remains agile and responsive to the ever-changing needs of students. The aim of the survey is to inform areas of improvement in service delivery, and to document the impact the CUC has on students. In Sem I 2021, 124 students complete the survey, out of a possible 200 students who registered with CUC Far West. This is a 62% response rate, providing a representative sample size for results.

99% of students are likely to recommend the CUCFW to others

This endorsement from students is both a positive reflection on the service and facilities of the CUC, and an important tool to promote the local higher education opportunities and support available. Word of mouth remains the most common way that new students hear about the CUC, which nurtures aspirations for higher education through positive local examples.

Wrap around support and academic success

Every CUC student faces individual challenges in their higher education journey. The CUC aims to meet students where they are and provide tailored wrap around support. This includes support with general academic skills, assistance with university

administration, technology, wellbeing and creating a learning community to facilitate peer-support.

100% of students found our staff to be very or extremely helpful

A positive relationship between students and CUC staff is the foundation of meeting students where they are and developing individualised student support.

89% of CUC students felt that using the CUCFW helped to improve their academic results.

This question is an important reflection of both academic achievements, as well as student confidence in their studies. Success is different for every student, with individual student stories illuminating some of these different achievements

Learning Skills Advisors

The Learning Skills Advisor (LSA) program continues to grow and provide additional individualised support for students studying at the CUC Far West. In Semester 1, 2021, the LSA team completed 112 one-on-one consultations with 209 students and facilitated 16 workshops with 89 participants. 126 students who responded to the survey accessed an LSA this semester through workshops, one-on-one sessions, or online content.

98% of students who used the LSA program found their Learning Skills Advisor to be helpful.



I was awarded an Executive Dean's Award this year for 2020 and 2nd year of my degree. CUC Far West is a huge contributor to this award, Lisa Turner in particular, she has endured my procrastination and tangential mind. Furthermore the Board to management to staff the Far West team have supported, enabled and encouraged me to aspire to be more.



The facility and services being available have enabled me to upskill and still work in my current profession. The opening hours have allowed me to work after work hours, which has proven very useful for my study. It allowed me to work in a space separate from home environment and distractions



Highlights

474 students

CUC Far West has supported a growing 474 students since 2018. 200 students were using the facilities in Semester I, 2021

95% of students

are more likely to continue with their studies as a result of the help that they received from the CUC.

Success

95% of students believe the CUC has made it easier to stay, study or work in their community
89% of CUC students felt that using the CUC helped to improve their academic results

Graduates

Over 35 students have completed their course in the past three years of operation with most gaining local employment or continuing to post graduate studies.



The CUC Far West support their students education physically, emotionally and socially. This is done in a very safe inclusive and effective way. For me the wrap around support is awesome and is evolving with the growth and potential of Far West and the CUC as a whole.



Thanks to the environment at CUC, I've been able to maintain my 6.75/7 GPA this semester, while also working and managing family responsibilities with 4 young kids. I also received a Deans Award for my results in 2020, which is largely thanks to the supportive and focused environment at our CUC

Celebrating our Students



Emma Reeves

After successfully completing her Bachelor of Psychological Science in 2020, making her 1 of 21 CUCFW students who completed their studies in 2020, Em was offered a place in the highly competitive honours program through the Australian College of Applied Psychology commencing in 2021



I have always been interested in psychology, intrigued by the way the brain functions. I finally made the choice to study this degree because I developed a passion for sport and hoped to become a sports psychologist. The most enjoyable aspects are the personal and academic growth that it stimulated, and the many opportunities it has opened for my future career.



Martin Thrift

Marty is a recent graduate of CUC Far West, completing his Graduate Certificate in Internal Auditing in 2019. An absolute high achiever, Marty has returned in 2021 to tackle a Masters of Health Management with University of New England.



Having CUC has given me a clean, quiet, and dedicated study environment away from the distractions of work and home; it's available here in our close-knit community. If I were to give advice to others considering higher education, I would tell them to look no further than their own local town and to reach out to CUC Far West

Student Success

Graduate Student Story



Avril Harris

Bachelor of Nursing
University of South Australia

Avril was one of the first student to register for CUC Far West in 2018, having commenced her degree in that same year. CUC Far West became part of Av's journey and we are ecstatic to see her graduate class of 2020.

"I chose my degree after having my children. Having to return to work as a working mum, I wanted to ensure it was doing something I enjoyed; I was looking for enjoyment and fulfilment in a career. Nursing and midwifery were always something I was interested in, as I wanted a rewarding career helping and caring. There are challenges that all students face; as a regional student, they can be more complex, for me allocating uni time, to study full-time, was hard amongst my already busy life with two children and working 4 days a week. CUC was so crucial to my learning journey! It gave me a study space, allowing me to separate uni and home life, especially a quiet space away from the distractions at home (kids). This year (2021) I started my New Graduate year locally with the Far West Local Health Service where I have four rotations that will build on my experience and knowledge.

The advice I would give to others in the Far West considering higher education would be DO IT! CUC is a fantastic facility and available to help you achieve this."



I am incredibly happy and proud to be starting my career locally in my hometown. I am just happy to be finished and working this year. I have four rotations that will build on my experience and knowledge in my graduate year, and I will see where it takes me, nursing offers so many opportunities and I am excited for my future.



Graduation



The first inaugural graduation ceremony for 2019–2020 students

A note from our Chair

To our graduating students, we are all aware that every graduate faces a challenge to reach their admirable goal of graduating; financial worries, work commitments, health concerns, and looking after children and raising a family. You, the graduates of 2019 and 2020, have faced all of those challenges and, in addition, the anxieties caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, so your achievement is awe-inspiring. Under the most challenging circumstances, you have adapted, remained focused, and you have delivered. You've shown resilience and demonstrated true grit, and now in this moment of immense significance, you are ready to step up and make a difference.

You have the knowledge, the skills, and the humanity to tackle the most significant challenges of our time. Whether it's working to keep us healthy, educating our next generations, defeating the next pandemic, protecting our planet from climate change, or ensuring that everyone – no matter their background, creed, colour or class is treated equally and afforded the same chance to thrive.

But, regardless of the road you choose to take, it's time to unleash your potential, shape the challenges of our time and reach your goals.

Each of you is a world changer; I know it, your friends know it, and your families know it.

Each of you has already changed our little part of the world. For generations, we have told our children they could be whatever they wanted to be, but of course, in regional Australia. If your aspirations included a university education, that often meant you can be whatever you want – if mum and dad could financially afford to support your dream.

In 2016 when we began this journey, our vision was to create the opportunity for local people to achieve their education and career aspirations without leaving home, leaving our communities, and leaving their families and friends.

We knew that our young people were often leaving home and undertaking the biggest challenges of their life without the close support of family and friends. We knew that in many cases for those of us that are maybe not so young, the opportunity to continue or re-engage with education whilst raising our families, working, and the pressures of life were challenging, to say the least, sometimes impossible.

You, the graduates of 2019–2020, have just demonstrated to the entire world that we can all achieve those dreams without the need to leave home, without the additional expense of relocating and without the barriers often created through family, work, and life.

You have just shown every person in our communities that it can be done; you can achieve your educational aspirations, achieve outstanding success and do it all from your hometown.

Through your commitment to achieving your ambitions, you have supported the workforce needs of our community. Most importantly, you have supported the aspirational development of our young people. For whatever reason, they can't or don't wish to leave home to further their education because they now know they don't need to. They can achieve those goals right here with the support of family and friends and the familiarity of home.

The legacy you have left our community is enormous, and I honestly believe that legacy will help shape our community in the future.

Thank you for entrusting your education to us at CUC Far West, and through your engagement, you have also helped us shape the future of the Centre to ensure we continue to build and grow and meet the needs of our students.



Community Engagement

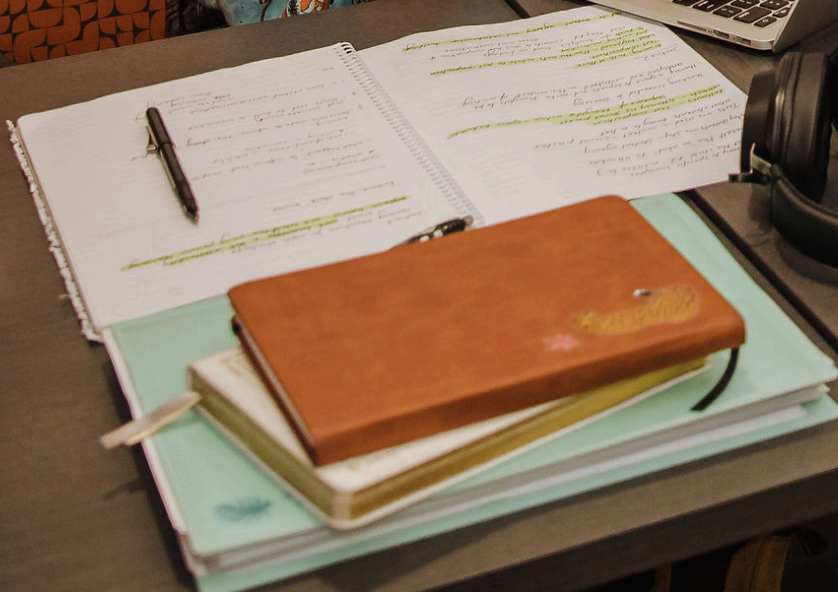


High School Support Programs

Throughout 2020 and 2021 CUC Far West has continued forging powerful connections with local high schools delivering collaborative workshops aimed to build aspirations of our region's students. In cocreation with both local High Schools, the Life Literacy program is designed as a student-led model with CUC staff to facilitate participation, discussions and promote collaboration. Both local High Schools have commenced participation in the three-year program delivered across grades 10-12.

Discover CUC Far West

On the 30th January, CUC Far West opened its doors to future students and general community to explore the local facilities and chat with students' staff and university representatives about study options and careers. The event including career close-ups where participants gained insight into selected professions from local students and industry experts, creating a chance to build people's aspirations in the Far West. Further encouraging future students to consider their career trajectory in the context of local opportunities



Alumni

CUC Far West



Amanda Fox

Andra Kloczko

Andrew Schultz

Breeanna Visser

Christine Punch

Alex Forner

Hannah Schultz

Dhyani Carroll

Indiana Shamroze-Tumes

Cat Woodman

Lisa Turner

Lindsay Ball

Martin Thrift

Taylor Huxtable

Michael McIvor

Avril Harris

Brylee Tracey

Claudia Jenkin

Holly Howard

Jennifer Wellington

Rahel Boon

Georgy Seward

Jenny Shroff

Sharon DeFranceschi

Emma Reeves

Teagan Hedrick

Paige Cuy

Rani Little

Shannon West

Karren Howe





Study Room

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ZONE

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Far West

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