

Teaching old dads new tricks

Across Tasmania, fathers of all kinds, many who left school with low literacy and have been long-term unemployed, are getting a second chance to learn through a thriving network of dads groups, while their kids play on the swings outside. Quest meets the man whose own learning journey has made it all happen.

In a quiet suburb of Launceston, Tasmania, a group of seven or eight weary-looking men are gathered at the end of a long day. There's a sea of shorts, long beards, tattoos, and blundestone boots but they are not at a building site or the local pub. This is the Northern Suburbs Community Centre, a small fibro building that is swarming with kids of many ages careering through doors and shrieking down corridors while their fathers and grandfathers settle into old worn couches to enjoy a cup of tea. They look out for one another's children, comforting bumps and falls and checking if they've eaten some fruit.

This is one of an expanding network of dad's groups in Tasmania,



Mick Goss and David Cooke

groups where men socialise, support one another and, increasingly, are getting learning opportunities that, for some, have evaded them all their lives. It wouldn't exist if it weren't for the passion and dedication of Mick Goss and his own experience with adult learning.

Mick has been the main carer for his son since he was three months old. He was asked to coordinate a Dads' Activity group by Relationships Australia after successfully initiating a dads' playgroup in 2003. Initially he was reluctant to take on the position;

he had been unemployed for several years with a back injury and he also had low literacy, having left school at fifteen to work in bakehouses and timber yards, but with the encouragement of his support worker at Relationships Australia, he decided to give it a go.

Based at Ravenswood Neighbourhood House, the group's activities were initially pretty simple; "sausages and hamburgers and sitting around chatting", but Mick soon realised that the dads were interested something more; "They were

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loving coming together but they also wanted to learn," he says.

In the meantime, Mick had been doing a bit of learning of his own, prompted by the other staff at Ravenswood and his embarrassment at the written reports he was asked to submit; "It was shocking. I used to hide my spelling mistakes by scribbling," he says.

He started with basic computing and the impact on his self-esteem was enormous; "We had a great person teaching us and I wasn't the only one in the class, there was three others. They built my confidence up. I realised there was spell check!" Mick says. Mick's computing class spring boarded into a two-day child safety course and his portfolio started to build from there.

Buoyed by the success of his own learning, he began organising training opportunities for his dads' group starting with 'Dads in the kitchen,' a healthy eating and cooking course. Everybody loved it, including the trainer, who threw out her training notes after the first half hour ("Dads learn differently") and ended up with a certificate, "they were pretty proud," says Mick. From macaroni cheese, the dads moved onto first aid, computing, mental health and parenting



"I still don't feel comfortable going back into classrooms."

"I think I've still got a fear of seeing that teacher laugh at me."

skills. They would support one another, sitting around the table, with the written components of their training while the kids played nearby.

In 2009, the Smith Family began to recognise some of the dads' group training as prior learning for their certificates in Introduction to Community Services. "From there I had three guys go off and do full Certificate II and III," Mick says.

At one stage there was almost too much going on. "I nearly burned them all out," laughs Mick. "Everybody wanted to throw learning stuff to the dads and it was great but we had to put our foot down and say, no we're having a day off, going off fishing, or down the park with the kids, just to have time for ourselves."

Mick has been running his group for seven years. A few years ago he successfully applied for funding and set up a second group and recently a third, which are now run by other dads he has

mentored. "One of the big things to come out of that community development is the dads' confidence to run another group."

There's a diverse mix of people in the groups; "we've got grandfathers who are looking after grandkids at home, dads who only see their kids on certain days, dads who are bringing kids up on their own, and dads that are happily married."

From what started off as a fortnightly playgroup, Mick is justifiably proud of what he has achieved. "There was nothing here in Tasmania for dads to get together and now we've got three major dads' groups in Launceston and it's filtered out to other suburbs, other towns."

Word has spread state-wide and Mick is often asked to go and speak about his programs to other centres, an opportunity he often passes up because he likes to be home when his son gets off the bus. "It's awkward for me, being a single dad and living out of town, to be able to get someone to look after my boy after school." But he did recently give a presentation to the local Lions Club who offered some funding to support the program. "Out of that money we were able to take 26 away to Bridport for four days camping over the Christmas break."

Reflecting on his own experience of education, Mick believes there needs to be a lot more opportunities for informal adult learning. "I still don't feel comfortable going back into classrooms. I think I've still got a fear of seeing that teacher laugh at me."

He's much more positive about small group learning at neighbourhood houses. "We need to be open to diversity in education. Not all kids are going to be able to sit behind a desk

and pass in a classroom and to me, there's too much focus on that. We need the kids up to that certain level, but if a kid can't do it, not just because he's being lazy, but he just can't do it, why should he miss out?"

Right now, Mick is arranging this year's programme for the dads and they've asked for a welding course. "The last five or six years have been around cooking and education, computer classes and things like that. I never thought about welding or woodwork, but I think we might be getting them up and going."

As for Mick's own learning, he was signed up to do his diploma in family service but has had to postpone due to his own health problems. "In the future I'll be doing that," he says.



Chris Howard

Chris Howard started attending Mick's group five years ago when he was forced to leave his job in a microbiology lab to take up sole care of his five children. He describes it as "a bit of a shock to the system," but he soon set about taking up some of the learning opportunities offered within the group.

He completed a number of short courses in food safety, child safety, first aid but when he started a computing course, the tutor took him aside and suggested he should teach it instead. Chris bundled up all his training to sign up for the Smith Family's Certificate II in

Community Services and started teaching computing at Northern Suburbs Community Centre.

Now he teaches computing skills in several different community centres and mentors other men in the dads' group one-on-one to improve their literacy and computer skills.

He has successfully applied for funding for literacy programs, ESIT training, anger management and food safety and is currently lobbying the Department of Community Services for "a bit more education" for dads.

The learning he did in the Dads' Activity group was a great launching pad for Chris; "When I was doing the Cert II in Community Services and we were actually getting the evidence together for my portfolio, that's when it really hit home how much learning I'd done."

David Cooke

Like Mick, David Cooke has been a sole parent to his son since he was three months old.

David attends two dads groups in Launceston each week and is currently being mentored in his learning by fellow dad, Chris Howard.

David was forced to leave school at age 13 due to the sexual abuse he was suffering from his stepfather at home. "It was all around the school and I just didn't feel comfortable with the police coming up there all the time, so I just didn't bother going," he says.

Too young to get the dole and unable to face school, he moved into St Johns Street boys' shelter where he tried to continue his learning in basic literacy and numeracy. "I always loved learning but I've always had a disability



so I've been a slow learner," says David.

Through his twenties and thirties, David attempted many adult education courses but they all moved too fast for him; "I've got a bad memory, so its hard to keep it all in."

Low literacy made it hard for David to find a job and when he did have work he had trouble with basic tasks such as writing down his hours; "Because I couldn't write it down I ended up not getting paid." He was in a constant battle with Centrelink due to his struggle to sustain work.

He had been neither working nor learning for twelve months when he began attending Mick's Dads' group. He has now completed basic computing courses, first aid, skills for his Certificate 1 and is now working one-on-one with Chris Howard on his literacy and computer skills. "It's been a real achievement because I didn't even know how to turn a computer on before. Now I'm getting out doing it for myself and doing my own thing."

David now has an even stronger motivation to improve his literacy; "I need to get my life back a bit more for my son because he seems to be struggling at school himself and the things he needs help with, I can't help. He's helping me more than I'm helping him at times."

David believes that the learning he has done recently has been the most valuable and effective he has ever done; "I don't have to rush to get it all done. I have trouble remembering things so it makes it hard and once I've got a lot on my mind you just forget it really easily. Chris just said 'take as long as you like. I'm there for you if you need it,' so I took that opportunity and it's helped me. It's been good."

Editorial

Adult Learning Australia was very pleased to be funded by the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science, Research and Tertiary Education to coordinate and promote Adult Learners Week 2012 around the theme of Digital Literacy: Connecting and Learning through Technology.

If you are not one of the 486 (at last count) who have liked us on our Facebook page, I encourage you to do so. Or visit www.adultlearnersweek.org ALW is a great way to advertise and celebrate your course, program, community group or centre, so start planning an event and register it on the ALW website. This year's project includes a substantial investment in Facebook advertising so your event is sure to get to a wide market.

This edition of Quest highlights a diverse range of organisations that have provided important and at times life changing opportunities for adults to go on a journey of lifelong learning. What interests me about each of these success stories is that most lead back to the actions of one or two

individuals who saw a community need or opportunity and were indefatigable in their pursuit of it. Whether it be dads in a Tassie playgroup or literacy tutors in Victor Harbour, we could all take the advice of Yankilla CEO, Roger Sweet: "Bureaucratic people will give you a hundred reasons why something can't happen. You have to push past that."

This edition of Quest also includes an interview with President of Friends of Libraries Association, Alan Bundy. ALA has amongst its members a number of libraries that act as centres for lifelong learning in their communities. I call libraries the "infrastructure of adult literacy" because they so often provide the informal learning opportunities that underpin literacy development and allow for success in formal education.

Many years ago I worked in a remote community teaching adult literacy. The community had no library, no public internet, and the local store sold no books, magazines, or even writing implements.

My job felt very much like pouring water into a fork and then handing it to a thirsty person. Since that experience I am delighted whenever I hear about new libraries or library services opening up in remote communities and am incredibly impressed by the work of people like Alan.

This edition also includes an interview with Professor Lyn Carson talking about deliberative democracy. Lyn will be speaking at the ALA conference in Byron Bay in October. In an effort to practice what we preach, the Byron conference has an emphasis on dialogue and discussion with less "talking at" and more "talking with". If you haven't seen the program, I encourage you to do so.



Sally Thompson,
CEO, ALA

Adult Learners' Week is an opportunity to celebrate, promote and advance adult learning in all its forms. By celebrating Adult Learners' Week together, we can raise the profile of adult learning and highlight its value. Adult Learners' Week is an international event. It is celebrated in over 40 countries around the world and has been held in Australia every year since 1995.

1 – 8 September Adult Learners' Week

This year's theme is Digital literacy – Connecting and learning through technology

Get involved

Adult Learners' Week is an opportunity for organisations that offer any form of adult learning activity to either present a special promotional activity or to label their existing learning activities as Adult Learners' Week events. If your organisation offers any

form of adult learning such as courses, classes, lectures, exhibitions, tours, training programs, tutoring, discussion groups – then Adult Learners' Week is an opportunity to celebrate and promote what you do.

Learn more....

www.adultlearnersweek.com

Upcoming Webinars

Adult Learning Australia run regular professional development webinars for people who work in adult and community education.

For guidelines on how to participate please visit our website at www.ala.asn.au/webinars/

Designing, presenting and validating your learning and assessment strategies for low-level learners.

13 July 2012 1:00 pm

To achieve good outcomes for low-level learners, it is important to consider the appropriateness and quality of your learning and/or assessment strategies.

Our next webinar in the LLN series will focus on the art of designing and presenting appropriate learning and assessment strategies for low level learners (ACSF Pre-level 1 or Level 1).

Our presenter, Philippa McLean will share tips and advice from her extensive experience in adult language, literacy and numeracy. The second half of this webinar will be devoted, once again, to validation. This involves participants sharing one small teaching or assessment strategy for the group to validate.

Demystifying the balance sheet

20 July 2012, 1.00pm

Whilst it is often portrayed as a mysterious report, it is actually one of the most beautiful, as it provides information about what an organisation owes, owns – and what it is worth.

In this session, Morri Young will explain in simple terms why the Balance Sheet is one of the most important tools for a decision-maker. You will learn how this report can save you from going to jail for trading whilst insolvent.

Morri will describe the concepts behind the Balance Sheet, its relationship to the Profit and Loss Statement and what all the terms mean. This session will give you the tools to engage in intelligent conversations with accountants and auditors.

The 3 R's of volunteer management: Recruitment, retention and recognition

10 August 2012, 1.00pm

Volunteers help to keep community organisations sustainable and viable. But volunteer management can be challenging. It requires effective planning in terms of Recruitment, Retention and Recognition – the 3 Rs.

This session will cover the key aspects of a successful volunteer program in terms of the 3Rs. Participants will enhance their understanding of best practice in volunteer management. They will also be given the opportunity to share and reflect on their experiences.

Our presenter, Rae Plush, is the Training and Regional Development Manager for Volunteering SA–NT.

* Times are Melbourne EST

2012 Adult Learning Australia Awards

The 22nd Annual ALA Awards will be presented during the ALA National Conference Dinner to be held on **Thursday Oct 11, 2012.**

Individuals, organisations and communities are strongly encouraged to nominate themselves or others for one or more of the following categories:

Australian Adult Educator of the Year

Australian Community-based Adult Learning Provider of the Year

Australian Community-based Adult Learning Program of the Year

Australian Indigenous Community Learning Provider of the Year

For more information:
www.ala.asn.au

2012 National ALA Conference

Lifelong Learning
= Resilient Communities

Byron Bay, NSW

11th and 12th October, 2012

For booking information
contact ALA on 03 9652 0861
or visit

www.ala.asn.au/conference



Morri Young

For non-accounting people, talking about the Balance Sheet is the quickest way to end a conversation.

Provider Profile

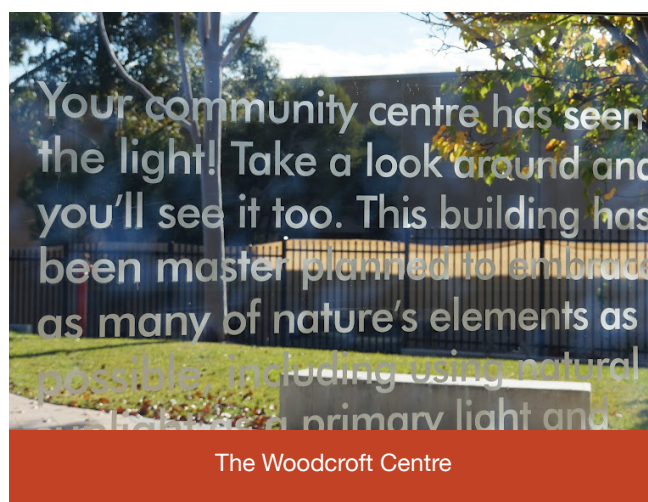
A day in the life of South Australian ACE

Leading the way with green buildings and innovative social enterprise programs, regional South Australia is home to some exciting community learning centres and recently Quest was lucky enough to visit four of them in a day as part of Community Centres SA's three-day conference held in May.

In an impressive feat of logistics, conference organisers coached 50 participants, (complete with luggage) to four different regional towns covering over 150 kilometres.

The day kicked off at the spectacular Woodcroft Community Centre and library (also housing Onkaparinga city council), an eight million dollar state-of-the-art sustainable building design that left us all inspired by its green features. Highlights included an air conditioning system that senses when there are a large number of people in the room (by raised carbon dioxide levels) and automatically increases the amount of oxygen being introduced into the air. Good news for sleepy students.

Other highlights included a beautiful crèche where children



could play while parents did classes and the stunning library—a wonderland of creatively designed reading nooks, natural sunlight, cushioned areas and bright decoration. It was inspiring to see so much care and expense poured into a facility for all the community to use.

Next stop was Yankalilla, a small community approximately 50 kilometres southeast of Adelaide.

The house that Yankalilla built

The Yankalilla Youth and Community Centre is quite literally the town's crowning glory, perched up on a hill that overlooks the whole township and it's creation is a testament to the power of partnerships.

Just three years old, the centre would not have been built if it weren't for the efforts of local Lyons Club member, Jim Martin, who deeply believed that the community needed something for its young people.

He recruited fellow Lyons club board member, Bill Leckie, and together they approached the executives of Star Fish Hill, a local power company, and asked them for a contribution to build a centre.

Star Fish offered \$40,000 but they wanted it to be for the whole community (not just young people) and they wanted to work in partnership with other funding bodies, so Bill and Jim approached the council and they



matched the same amount. They then applied for state and federal funding and lastly went to the most important stakeholders of all—the community—to ask for contributions.

Gold and silver levels of membership were created to reflect the amounts that community organisations gave. It ranged from \$10 to \$6,000, which was given by an individual family specifically for a kitchen (there is now a plaque above the stove.) Finally they had \$240,000 to spend on their building and an architect (Bill's son) to do their design.

The building is an impressive, yet welcoming ochre-coloured rammed earth with *The Centre* written in giant silver letters across the entire front wall.

“What you have here is a community effort,” says Jim Martin. The Lyons club took on the kitchen and Jim did much of the construction and fit out himself.

Roger Sweet, CE of Council of Yankallia says the building is testimony to the power of partnerships; “None of the groups involved in this building could have built it on its own,” he says, “For small communities like this one, it's imperative to have partnerships and to think outside the square.”

“Bureaucratic people will give you a hundred reasons why something can't happen. You have to push past that.”

He emphasise the role that Jim and Bill played. “I don't think council could have gone straight to the community like Jim and Bill did,” he says. “They wouldn't have given us any money!”

He also emphasises the persistence that communities need to have to make their dreams a reality. “In the nicest possible way, I'm a bureaucrat,” he says. “Bureaucratic people will give you a hundred reasons why something can't happen. You have to push past that.”

The centre houses service providers in disabilities, jobs, and psychology with a local caseload who used to have to travel almost hour a way for appointments with no public transport.

Recently The Centre has received ACE funding and coordinator Claire Taylor says the foundations skills classes including cooking, sewing and reading to children (all with embedded literacy), have been a real injection of liveliness into the centre.

The Encounter Centre

The first thing you see when you walk in the front door of the Encounter Centre, Victor Harbor, are shelves of delightful hand-painted wooden toys that have



Conference participants on the coach



been made by the participants who come here.

is hired by the local men's shed group.

There is a great atmosphere in her classroom.

Down the hall, the commercial kitchen is buzzing and conference delegates are served a delicious shepherd's pie and steamed vegies, prepared once again by a team of community volunteers and learners.

Originally established in 1974 as a support service for the intellectually and physically challenged, it has now expanded to provide participants the opportunity to develop skills and enjoy social interaction with a wide cross section of community members.

The centre boasts a vibrant array of learning spaces, including the carpentry workshop where toys and cabinetry are produced, a nursery, community garden, kitchen and literacy classrooms. A full time workshop coordinator makes sure everyone uses the wood-working equipment safely and on Fridays it

ACE programs run in the form of literacy classes for people with and without intellectual disabilities, as well as ESL. Quest catches up with tutor **Leonie Matthews** during her literacy for intellectual disabilities class.

"Exercise is really good to stimulate the brain, so we start off with either exercise to music or walking for ten minutes and then come back and get straight into journal writing," Leonie explains. The students then use their own

interests to practice public speaking and increase one another's vocab. "One boy spoke about his fishing this morning," says Leonie, "and last week one of the other boys brought in a model ship that he's building. Those boys normally don't talk."

Drawing on her teaching background, Leonie and her team come up with a theme for each term. "This term we're looking at animals. Next week we're going to the local wildlife park so that involves not just vocabulary, but learning about their habitat, their food."



The Encounter Centre workshop and wooden toys

"I don't think it's all about improving dramatically in the literacy skills, it's about improved self esteem and communication, and genuine acceptance of one another."

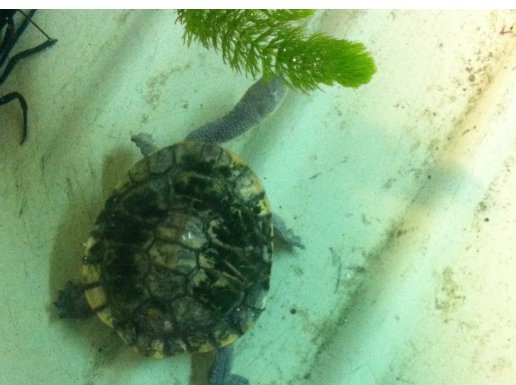
... Leonie Matthews



The classes go for the whole day, with formal learning in the morning and informal activities, like computer literacy programs, games, puzzles and free reading in the afternoon. Leonie has been teaching here for almost seven years and many of her students have been with her for all of that time.

"Everyone that has been involved has improved in their confidence," says Leonie. "I don't think it's all about improving dramatically in the literacy skills, it's about improved self esteem and communication, and genuine acceptance of one another. That wasn't happening when I first started, they were very much on their own, and we've really worked hard as a team to develop that acceptance."

A limited amount of funding covers a portion of the few employees, and the rest of the costs are met by the sale of the toys and plants from the nursery.



They even have a customised trailer to take their toys to markets and events.

Another winding drive along the expansive South Australian coastline through spitting rain leads us to the day's last stop and conference venue for the next two days—historic Milang.

www.encountercentre.com.au

Milang Old School House Community Centre

Full of tumbling stone buildings lining a wide grey sea, Milang is piece of South Australia's history as well as the mouth of the mighty Murray River.

The remainder of the conference will be held at the Milang Old School House Community Centre, and Quest catches up with coordinator Karyn Bradford before the crowds arrive for dinner.

Behind the old schoolhouse is a large shed that looks more like a marine research facility than a community learning space. Karyn explains how increasing river salinity has meant that saltwater tubeworms have been able to move into the river and infest the shells of freshwater turtles. The worms bore thousands of tiny holes deep into the turtle's shell. "They either drowned or came up onto the shore, but then they couldn't retract their heads or their legs and so they were attacked by foxes and feral cats," says Karyn.

Four years ago, children from the local school began rescuing the turtles, bringing them back to the shed and soaking them in fresh water, which killed the tubeworm. They rescued over 3,000 turtles and released them back into the wild when the salinity levels dropped, except for a few pets kept for education purposes.

The shed is now used as a teaching resource for other schools, environmental groups and for the Cert IV and Cert III level in Conservation and Land Management training that the centre runs. "We're able to tell them about the local species that were really threatened," says Karyn. "It's not just turtles, there are Murray Cod, Bony Bream and other local native fish cruising around in the tanks. We Noah's Arked some of the smaller native fish because there was such concern that they would be wiped out." Many students come from the Nanggumiri sister community across the lake; "It's been really fantastic to rebuild those relationships," says Karyn.

The issues around water levels meant that all of the lakes communities became much closer aligned and partnered in lots of training programmes and activities. "The water in the lakes dropped a metre and a half below sea level, which is unheard of in black fella history," Karyn explains, "It was disastrous for the economies around the lakes. People couldn't irrigate, we couldn't get water for stock and domestic use."

Karyn fondly recalls one particular learner, Deb, a young mum with five children who'd left school very early. She got involved in some volunteering when she came to live in Milang, completed the land conservation course to a Cert IV level and now runs a community nursery and planting team, providing job opportunities for twenty people in the local region. "At her graduation night she said she could never have believed that she would have the confidence to stand up in front of a crowd, achieve what she has achieved and be able to use what she learned in the local community."

www.moshcc.com.au

Deliberate democracies harness public power through learning

Your past experiences with deliberative democracy are very inspiring. What do you see as the barriers that may prevent these processes from taking a firmer hold in Australia? Could learning processes help us move beyond these?

At this year's ALA National Conference, keynote speaker, Lyn Carson, professorial fellow with the School of Humanities and Communication Arts at the University of Western Sydney, will speak about her research in the field of deliberative democracy and how the wider public can help to resolve policy challenges.

Quest catches up with her about her work and what's in store for conference participants in October:

becoming the content of the dialogue.

Some of the most significant learning occurs during the conversations amongst the group itself. Because it's a diverse, randomly selected slice of the population, the group has a considerable combination of life experiences to draw upon.

I think of deliberative democracy as active citizenship. It has three essential characteristics: inclusion—to ensure diversity; deliberation—which involves learning and discussion; and influence—or impact. Deliberative democrats know it's possible to create really good public deliberations by bringing a microcosm of any given population together. So the first two essential characteristics can be achieved. The third is definitely the most difficult.

Public deliberations (also known as *mini-publics*) have a tremendous impact on participants. However, it's much more difficult to have elected representatives to heed participants' thoughtful recommendations.

Effective learning processes are fundamental to mini-publics and adult learning principles are routinely used. Deliberation itself is a learning process, as participants need information



to ensure their deliberations are informed. But this is not lecture-style, didactic delivery of information. It's essential that convenors ensure that clear information is available and that participants can have all their questions answered. However, deliberation is dialogic, and it's often experiential. The information is used in some practical way as well as

Critical thinking is emphasised. Evidence is interrogated. This includes asking hard questions about how and why we think like we do about certain issues. People would be asked to challenge acceptance of power relations that permeate our thinking. They would also be invited to question how issues are framed to perhaps coercively shape our dialogue. Deliberative process and facilitation can help participants dig down into that.

But I would repeat that it's difficult to have recommendations acted upon. Therefore, learning processes *would* help deliberative democracy to take hold but that learning would be amongst *those who make decisions*. Some recent research in the US shows that elected representatives are wary of deliberative democracy; they are also extremely ignorant about it. Trust in a deliberative

process cannot be taught. But I think that positive exposure to deliberative methods may relax some of that wariness.

You have said that the ‘typical citizen’ is perfectly capable of responding to complex issues. Nevertheless, do you still see a value in educating people about how to participate more actively in democracy? Where and how might that learning best occur?

We learn how to be democrats through the practice of democracy (not the practice of contemporary *representative government*, but genuine democracy, in the Ancient Athenian sense, where lotteries for public service were routine). I want to create opportunities for people to experience and understand the benefits for themselves of public deliberation.

Typical citizens are perfectly capable of responding to complex issues. That doesn’t mean that they need to become rocket scientists overnight in order to deliberate on rocket science. Usually the complexity of issues means that value judgments must be made. These are the type of quandaries that scientists don’t particularly wish to deal with. They are happy to do the science but prefer that others deal with the values that underpin their discoveries. The Danish Board of Technology understood that; it routinely convened consensus conferences amongst (self-selecting, then) randomly-selected citizens to consider the appropriateness of various innovations (of scientific or technological nature).

Deliberation requires learning. Good information leads to good decision-making.

“Deliberative democrats know it’s possible to create really good public deliberations by bringing a microcosm of any given population together.”

Co-intelligence is inspiring to observe in action, and that’s what seems to happen when citizens take on the role of thinking on behalf of others. This, of course, was meant to be how democracy would function. It’s the difference between public

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“Some recent research in the US shows that elected representatives are wary of deliberative democracy; they are also extremely ignorant about it.”

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opinion—through focus groups and opinion polls, for example, and public judgment—through practices such as citizens’ juries and participatory budgets.

People who attend public deliberations always behave respectfully. That’s because

the design of the process motivates them to be positive and constructive. Aside from slowing people down if they are overly talkative, and helping the timid speak up, little further help is required in terms of how to do it. The challenge is to help those who might discount people deliberation as “mere talk” when it is far more than that.

Adult and community education (ACE) encompasses a diverse range of different providers including neighbourhood houses, community centres, libraries, men’s sheds and many others. How could ACE providers apply principles of active democracy in their work? What do you see as the intersection between democracy and learning?

ACE providers get adult learning principles. No one is better positioned to *enact* deliberative democracy than they are because of its



symbiotic relationship with learning. Democracy is more than a constitution or voting or internal security. Democracy is an everyday 'practice' that is continually evolving. Learning is an inherent part of that practice. The idea of practice is at the heart of most adult education approaches now.

ACE providers' own organisations are a good place to start. I realise that some will be doing this already—I know of some inspiring workplaces. An organisation can routinely draw upon the collective intelligence in its ranks. Not just the upper echelons, but the lower ranks as well. A random sample can guarantee that a real cross-section is selected. If we ask who wants to participate, the 'usual suspects' or hyper-interested individuals will come forward. But if we *invite* a representative sample through a lottery, a microcosm of the whole; and we use small groups dialogic methods of problem solving and visioning; give them the power to make decisions which affect themselves and their peers; and engage them in a real spirit of learning and inquiry; magic happens.

ACE providers are experts in these techniques. There is increasing acceptance of leadership that takes a more facilitative than authoritarian stance. Diverse groups make excellent decisions. They will own those decisions and share their enthusiasm for the decisions with others. In turn, an organisation and a community is strengthened. This is deliberative democracy at work.

Some theorists have suggested that the rise of the internet has created a significant change in citizen capacity. This has largely been at an individual level through social media, but is increasingly beginning to mobilise groups. How can the internet be used to empower community organisations?

Social media is a great tool for organising and mobilising people, who are excited or angry, to act. It's especially good at reaching young people who might otherwise be reluctant to be involved in policy or political dialogue.

I'm intrigued, as one example, by the Occupy Movement and its demonstrated capacity to mobilise people via smart phones, then to use efficient decision making techniques face-to-face. They did this with hand signals in large crowds, for instance. They've self-organised in an accomplished manner. There is wisdom in crowds but not in mobs, whether the mob is online or face-to-face.

Social media can broaden an audience even in a local area. Many local councils are using it well; gaining resident feedback and sometimes doing an online deliberation.

I see real value in the combination of social media and face-to-face. Much work is going on to narrow the gap between the two. So far, online deliberation alone does not seem to have the empowering force of face-to-face deliberation but I would wish to harness it. We did this for the Australian Citizens' Parliament: online deliberations culminating in face-to-face discussions. It can be a terrific combination.

What can we look forward to hearing from you at our national conference in October?

I'd like to share some inspiring case studies of ways to deliberate collectively for societal good. My current work is focused on solving intractable problems. I think we can do this collaboratively, but we need new tools to tackle these increasingly complex challenges. A vibrant and sustainable democracy is possible. I think deliberative democracy and active citizenship is the key. We can't meet these challenges by doing more of the same.

We need to draw citizens together routinely—not everyone, every time, but an ever-rotating cross-section of the entire population. We can have them address these matters, thoughtfully and deliberately, in partnership with experts and elected representatives. I've seen it work time and again. I know how robust these processes are. I'd really like to understand how the adult learning community could help to strengthen these practices even more.

Lyn was involved in convening or supporting Australia's first Consensus Conference, the first Deliberative Polls, the first Australian Citizens' Parliament, numerous Citizens' Juries and Community Summits and a host of other public deliberations at local, state and national levels. She is currently a director of The newDemocracy Foundation and a board member of Oxfam as well as Essay Editor of the Journal of Public Deliberation.

**www.newdemocracy.com.au
www.activedemocracy.net**

For what are libraries, if not for learning?

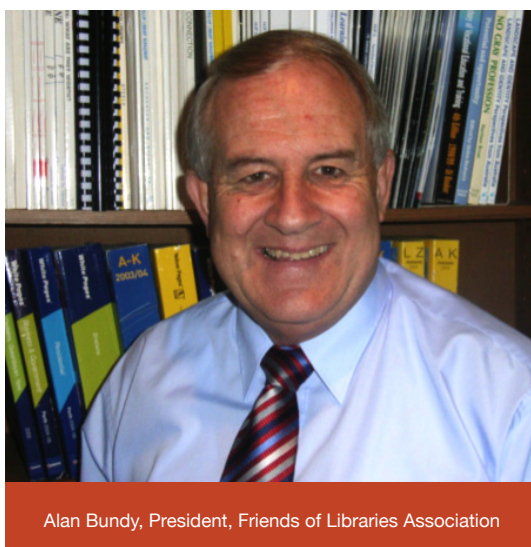
No longer merely a repository of books, libraries are currently in a state of dynamic evolution, with their mission shifting increasingly towards community learning. In September this year, Sally Thompson from Adult Learning Australia will be presenting at the trans Tasman Learning for All conference about the partnership possibilities for libraries and ACE organisations.

**Quest speaks to conference organiser and
President of Friends of Libraries Association, Alan Bundy:**

Libraries have been your life's work and clearly they are a great passion for you. Why they are so important to our society? Why should we value them?

Like many among the 60% of Australians who use Australia's 1520 public libraries, I am passionate about the contribution that they make to a more inclusive, connected and learning society – and all for only 10 cents per Australian per day, and a demonstrable return on investment of at least \$4 for every dollar spent on them!

Growing up in post war Britain I was fortunate to have a public library within walking distance of my home, and ready access to its resources and the encouragement of its librarians contributed greatly to my education during my formative years. Many others, such as Philip Adams, report the same experience, and it is important that everyone, regardless of their circumstances, has the same opportunity and encouragement in 21st century Australia. As another example, science fiction writer Ray Bradbury, who died this year at the age of 91, attributed his great success to public libraries, declaring that 'I spent three days a week for ten years educating myself in the public library'.



"Public libraries have also continued to evolve, and are now regarded as critical agencies for connecting communities, community capacity building, literacy development and lifelong learning."

Public libraries are unique in their multidimensional responses to the needs of people of all ages, literally from 'cradle to grave'. No other public agency has such a broad remit, challenge and opportunity. Whilst they have never been more used, physically and online, or busier than they are now, there are still too many children and adults missing out on what they can contribute to their life chances because of unawareness of them or difficulty in accessing them.

In Victoria alone, from extensive research, at least 13% of the population are still missing out. This translates to over 3 million people across Australia. This would include many migrants and refugees, despite Australia's public libraries as a whole providing great and innovative learning and literacy programs and support for them.

What is driving the changes we are seeing in today's libraries? What do you see as the role of public libraries in adult literacy and adult learning?

All types of libraries are taking advantage of the digital age and electronic resources to meet and stimulate user needs and information literacy. Public libraries have also continued to evolve, and are now regarded as critical agencies for connecting communities, community capacity building, literacy development and lifelong learning. They are now increasingly described as the community's Third Place, after home, school and work.

With the increasing investment in modern large buildings with specialised learning and other spaces and a wide range of electronic and other resources available seven days a week, Australia's public libraries are

becoming more able to be involved and innovative in the adult literacy and learning areas. As an indicator of this Australia's first Year of Reading in 2012 has been a national public library initiative which has connected many adult literacy and learning agencies at the local level.

What partnership possibilities do you see for libraries and ACE (adult and community education) providers?

The trans Tasman *Learning for All* conference (see www.auslib.com.au) will be held at the State Library of Victoria 13-14 September 2012. Its context is that although the origins of the free public library movement in the 19th century were focused on literacy and learning, the second half of the 20th century saw a focus on the lending of an increasing range of resources and public library programs to meet the reading, literacy and learning needs of children, students and other young people.

More recently commentators, internationally and in Australia, have been suggesting that public libraries should, in a sense, return to their 19th century roots with learning for all and reader development, in all of its manifestations, as their core mission. As one of those international commentators, who will be a keynote speaker at the conference, has asked 'For what are libraries, if not for learning?'

The conference will see many examples of partnerships between public libraries and learning providers, but more importantly it will focus on awareness raising for public librarians and providers about the potential for more of them, particularly in adult and community learning.

You are the National president of Friends of Libraries Association. The Friends of Libraries groups have a pretty dynamic involvement in their local libraries. How can they be part of a learning agenda?

"Public libraries are unique in their multidimensional responses to the needs of people of all ages, literally from 'cradle to grave'. No other public agency has such a broad remit, challenge and opportunity."

Friends of Libraries Australia (FOLA) has a commitment to awareness raising among the growing number of Friends of Libraries that their public libraries should be much more than just book lending agencies. It does this through its very informative website www.fola.org.au, its newsletter, policy papers and workshops.

On the FOLA website is a list it has compiled of over 200 descriptors of the multidimensional role and outcomes of public libraries, including descriptors such as 'Open learning centres', 'Partners in education', 'Platforms for self development' and 'Umbrella institutions of the learning society'.

We already have examples of Friends who have been very active in fundraising for specific library programs, but there is potential for more involving adult learning, and all FOLA members will be supplied with the outcomes of the Learning for All conference to encourage their efforts to this end.

Can you give us a couple of on the ground examples of innovative learning programs that are happening in Australian libraries?

Local government in Australia is taking an increasing leadership role in adult and community learning and usually the public library is heavily involved. A very early lead was taken by the City of Hume in Victoria. Two other examples from Victoria are Moonee Valley, where the Avondale Heights Library and Learning Centre and the 2012-16 Library and Learning Strategy enable partnerships with local training providers to deliver learning programs.

Brimbank Libraries have a major role in the city's key strategic direction of 'Creating a community of lifelong learners' and allocates significant resources to programs and partnerships with a wide range of service providers and community organisations.

ALA HAS A NEW PRESIDENT!



ALA is pleased to announce that the new president of Adult Learning Australia is **Professor Barry Golding**, Associate Dean – Research,

School of Education & Arts, University of Ballarat. Professor Barry Golding is an active and experienced researcher in adult and community education at University of Ballarat in Victoria. His commitment though ALA is to recognise, celebrate and promote the diverse approaches, to and wellbeing value of lifelong learning across the lifespan, particularly for adults with negative experiences of formal education.

Quest looks forward to speaking with Barry in our September issue.

It's in the post: books by mail

There is no doubt that libraries are a fantastic community resource, but what do you do when your nearest library is 800 km away and you love to read?

For an increasing number of rural Australians, the answer is in book-club programs that distribute titles by post. Two book-club participants share their stories with Quest...

Kalamunda Community Learning Centre, Western Australia

There is an Arabian proverb: A novel is a garden carried in the pocket. If this is so, an increasing number of book club readers in Western Australia enjoy literary gardens.

The non-profit Kalamunda Community Learning Centre, based in the hills east of Perth, hires out books, mainly fiction, to 35 clubs. Eleven of these book clubs meet at the Centre, while others gather in various suburbs and their secretaries come to the Centre to choose, take away or return their selections. The remainders of the clubs are in rural districts and the Centre mails parcels of books to them.

Books that are purchased retail at the most advantageous price that can be found. Twelve copies of each title are bought, as the clubs have a maximum of 12 members each.

Towards the end of each year a list of about 160 titles is issued and country clubs send in about 20 possible choices. The Centre tries to send one of each club's choices each month. Some of the rural clubs are composed



Weipa Waders

of people from farming families with no close access to a public library or bookshop. A charge of \$3 per copy is made to all clubs. Photocopied notes, from reasonably authoritative sources, are available for each title.

Club-members take a book home to read and perhaps make notes, before taking it to the following month's meeting to discuss. While some of the latest books are listed every year, favorites dating back over many decades are there too.

Kalamunda Community Learning

Centre began in 1977, primarily for women, with the philosophy of learning through sharing. Co-ordinators, tutors and work-group leaders all are volunteers. The only paid staff are those who run the crèche. At present there are 600 enrolments for 80 classes a week. There has always been a strong interest in the book clubs.

The American novelist William Styron believed 'A great book should leave you with many experiences, and slightly exhausted. You should live several lives while reading it.'

Tom Austin

Weipa Waders, Queensland

Weipa Waders is a group of eight, and we live in a remote mining town of 3,500 people on the West Coast of Queensland, near the tip of Cape York. Our nearest city is Cairns, which is 800 km away on a dirt road that is closed for four months of the year and takes 10 hours to drive, or an hour and a half flight if we need to get out in a hurry. Most of our supplies come by barge from Cairns. We do have a newsagent with a limited range of books for sale, and a small

library where we can order in books, but being members of CAE, Victoria, is an ideal way for us to access sets of books on regular basis.

The best part about book club is reading books you may never have considered reading previously. At year's end, we all submit our ideas for the following year's selection so with choices coming from the whole group, the list covers a wide range of interests. Sometimes the books just don't work out - Box 817 *Emperor's China, People's China* was a little like a text book and some didn't even attempt it, yet it was very interesting to others. The opposite extreme was our experience of reading Box 105 *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, which had a lot of members enthusiastically reliving their childhood reading experiences.

We normally meet in Alexis and Geoff's home, and drink copious amounts of tea – green, black, or black with milk – but on the occasion in the photo, we were sadly farewelling our GP Donna who has been promoted to Charleville Hospital. For the meeting of the hand-out of *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society*, we actually had a potato peel pie for supper! The taste of the potato peel crust quite surprised us all and really put us in the mood for reading the book. To honour the 200th

birthday of Charles Dickens, this month we read *A Christmas Carol* as well as our book club selection, *Nineteen Eighty Four*. The conversation on *A Christmas Carol* certainly lightened the mood following the discussion of George Orwell's depressing yet amazing predictions.

May marks Weipa Waders' tenth anniversary with the first meeting taking place on May 20th, 2002, and we still have two very active inaugural members, Karen Pritchard and Kath Newman. The group dynamics have changed over the years, but it has always been a pleasure to attend meetings and share our love of reading. At the moment, our group is quite diverse and includes a GP, a minister of religion, an IT expert, and an accountant, amongst other specialties, which means we have some very interesting discussions. Our only male member Geoff has been the lone ranger for some years, but enjoys putting the male point of view across and has a thick skin on some occasions! Most of us only meet at book club yet we know our friendship allows us to be frank and honest with our interpretations and understandings, as well as have our numerous questions answered.

Alexis, Secretary, Weipa Waders

CAE Book Groups is a significant part of CAE and operates as Australia's largest book group program for approximately 8500 members. The program has wide recognition throughout Australia and has members in all mainland states and territories. The program has significant autonomy: members of CAE Book Groups select their own pool of titles for their year's reading list; decide on monthly meeting times; choose their own members; and pick a place to meet such as a private home, café or library. CAE Book Group members can also suggest titles for inclusion in the program. From international award-winners to debut and Australian authors, there are over 1,000 books to choose from. Reading guides accompany each box of books and the questions provided can be used to frame each group's discussion.

bookgroups@cae.edu.au

Are you a member of Adult Learning Australia?

Becoming a member of Adult Learning Australia is a fantastic way to support lifelong and lifewide learning across Australia. Annual membership benefits include:

- Subscription to ALA's national quarterly magazine, *Quest*
- Subscription to the *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*
- Email notification of news, events, professional development webinars and submissions
- Invitations and discounts to special events including the ALA national conference
- Free advertising of jobs, events, training resources and courses on our website and in our publications
- Free use of the Elluminate training room

Individual, organization and concession memberships are available. For fees and further details, please go to

www.ala.asn.au/join-now/



2012 National ALA Conference

Lifelong Learning = Resilient Communities

Byron Bay, NSW

11th and 12th October, 2012

Adult Learning Australia is holding its 52nd Annual National Conference hosted by Byron Region Community College.

Registrations for the 2012 National Conference are now open.

Keynote speakers include:

Alan Tuckett, President of the International Council for Adult Learning.

Lyn Carson, professorial fellow with the School of Humanities and Communication Arts at the University of Western Sydney director of the new Democracy Foundation.

Robin Shreeve, Chief Executive of Skills Australia.

Professor Barry Golding, researcher in the School of Education, University of Ballarat and President Adult Learning Australia.

Annie Kia, Resilience Coordinator at North Coast Health Promotion.

Tiga Bayles, Chairperson of the National Indigenous Radio Service and National Ambassador for the National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy.

For more information and bookings contact ALA on 03 9652 0861
or visit **www.ala.asn.au/conference**

1 – 8 September Adult Learners' Week



Digital literacy: Connecting and learning through technology

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**National
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www.love2read.org.au

Digital business for NFPs

It's not just businesses that can benefit from a digital shopfront. 'Not-for-profit' and community organisations can gain a lot from being online, particularly as that is where most Australians are now communicating and connecting.

Having an online presence can open up so many opportunities for community organisations. It can help you:

- increase awareness of your campaign and communicate important messages
- share documents and resources
- sell products and services
- collect donations
- advertise events
- recruit volunteers.

But anyone who has worked in a community organisation knows how challenging it can be. There is a lack of physical resources, including computer hardware and software, and a lack of finances to buy these resources. Community organisations also often face a shortage of resources in terms of man power and volunteers, which makes it difficult to implement and maintain the use of ICT systems. And even if you are lucky enough to have the hardware, software and the volunteers, there simply may not be the required expertise in the organisation to use these effectively.

Sometimes getting online can be an expensive and time consuming process. But developments in digital technologies and applications,

such as social media, mean that it can also be done relatively easily and inexpensively, offering community organisations a whole range of potential productivity gains.



Natalie Viselli

But it all needs to start with a good plan.

It very easy to get caught up in the excitement of getting online. What you need to remember is that any online activities you engage in should fit into your overall business plan. So you need to ask yourself what are your organisational goals and what online activities will best help you achieve those goals. It is also important to consider things like your budget, your timeframes and your capabilities. A good plan will help you decide what online activities should work best for your organisation. So what are some of the online activities you could be engaging in?

Website

Websites come in all shapes and sizes, some of the most common being business card websites (which just have your basic

contact details and information), brochure websites (which showcase your products and services) and ecommerce websites (which facilitate financial transactions). Depending on your budget and your capabilities, you can choose to hire professionals to design and develop your website or build one yourself. Remember that your website should be visually engaging (use videos and images), easy to navigate and contain good content, links and metadata to

make sure the information is relevant for both your users and the search engines that rank your site.

Social media

More and more Australians are communicating with friends, family, brands and government through social media channels. It is important to remember that while social media offers a free online platform to build your web presence, it can be very time-intensive to manage your social media presence and moderate discussions. So rather than trying to be present on all social media channels, consider which will best help you achieve your goals and which is being used by your target market.

...continued next page

Digital business for NFPs

Online marketing

There are other ways that you can promote your business online. Email marketing is one of the most common. This allows you to send newsletters, campaign updates and event information to a mailing list of supporters. Another marketing tool is banner ads, which are advertisements on someone else's website. This can be done on a pay-per-click or pay-per-impression basis. You can also pay for advertising that appears at the top of search engine results on a pay per click or subscription basis.

Other productivity tools

The internet doesn't just offer your organisation an opportunity to have a presence online. It can offer a range of productivity tools that can help increase efficiencies and reduce costs – both of which are important in the resource-strained not-for-profit sector. Some of these tools include:

- VOIP: using online applications and services to make voice calls over the internet.
- Online collaboration: editing and storing documents online ("in the cloud"). Can be free or subscription based.
- Software as a service: Using online software, often priced on a subscription or pay per use basis, to perform tasks such as accounting, data back-up and asset management.
- Customer relationship management (CRM): using software to collate and analyse your customer/supporter data to better understand them and gain insights into your organisation.

If you want to learn more about how to plan your online engagement and what your community organisation can be doing online, you can get more information from

www.digitalbusiness.gov.au.



**Adult
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Australia** INC

Lifelong and Lifewide Learning
for All Australians

About Quest

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