

Sydney women get down to microbusiness

Where can new resident, Jiraporn go to improve her English, meet with friends, access childcare and learn social media all while developing a business plan for the clothing shop she hopes to open later this year? The answer lies within a small cottage in Sydney's multicultural Lakemba, home to the newly developed Migrant Women's Microbusiness Program. Presented for the first time this year as a partnership between Sydney Community College and the Canterbury City Community Centre, the program is paving new ground in adult learning for women.

The core program consists of nine months of weekly one-day classes and delivers a Certificate III in Micro Business Operations.

In addition to coursework, the program provides individual mentoring; numeracy and literacy support; and childcare in the very next room. "For some it is their first childcare experience. It's nice that they're only a room away," says Tonya Cook-Pedersen, who oversees the program with a specific focus on the mentoring



component. "It was a condition of the DEC funding that the program offered Pathway Planning and support strategies and was not just a course."

"I came from Thailand about two years ago," says student Jiraporn Temiyatanapong. "I would like to open a high fashion and children's clothing shop called Miss Woof. The name comes from my husband's dalmatian dog. I import good quality clothing from Thailand."

Tonya worked with Kate Maclean

from the Canterbury City Community Centre to recruit the eighteen participants through fliers and advertisements in local papers. "We wanted people with a concrete business idea and they had to have 2 on the English Language and Numeracy scale to function in a Cert III environment," Tonya explains. "We held an info session and for those who were interested, we did an English language assessment then and there."

Tonya believes the relaxed setting got the program off to

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Message from the CEO

Happy Adult Learners' Week 2012. By the time you read this Adult Learners' Week will be over but as I'm writing it's the day before it begins and I am planning a day of talking to radio and newspaper journalists tomorrow. There are two experiences that stand out in my mind about this year's ALW.

The first is being upstaged on radio by 86-year-old Barbara Winter. Barbara is a participant in the Broadband for Seniors program. She is the only person in her family who lives in Australia and she lives in regional Queensland. The internet has opened up a world of connections and information that keep her well, able to access services and socially connected. The Federal Government's modest investment in Barbara's learning has provided a significant return in other service provision areas.

The connection between community-based lifelong learning and participation in the labour market, particularly for disadvantaged Australians is well established and recognised in both policy and funding by state and federal governments. The relationship between lifelong learning and wellbeing, not so much. This remains one of ALA's biggest policy challenges. A recently published UK study (Fujiwara, D., Valuing the impact of adult learning, NIACE) shows that 57% of the return on investment in adult education is related to 'better social relationships'; 13% to 'improvements in health' and 11% to 'a greater likelihood that people will volunteer on a regular basis'.

Put simply, lifelong learning keeps you well, connected and able to manage your own life. The economic and employment benefits of a well, connected and self



managing population are obvious but indirect. Lifelong learning (particularly for non-working people) competes with activities that appear from the outside to be more directly related to the labour market, but which often don't address the longer term underlying barriers to social and economic inclusion.

What we see too often in Australia is an analysis of education spending which asks the question "how close is this activity to a skill that is in shortage in the labour market?" rather than "how does this activity contribute to a well, connected and self managing population?" and further "what is the most equitable way to distribute resources to ensure that all Australians can benefit?"

The second experience that stands out for me this Adult Learners' Week is an email we received at the beginning of the week from our colleagues at People's Initiative for Learning and Community Development (PILCD), Philippines. Last year I had the opportunity to meet some of the staff of PILCD. They are amazing advocates and activists for adult learning.

More than one million people in several cities in the Philippines

have been battling deadly floods amid relentless monsoon rains since early August and PILCD's Learning Center, where alternative learning programs were held for out-of-school youth and adults, was inundated with mud and water caused by a landslide resulting in considerable loss of valuable equipment, learning materials, and modules. Most of the equipment and materials damaged were acquired through hard-to-find funds, and the resource materials lost were important tools reflecting outcomes and learnings from recently-held workshops and meetings. Over 100 learners living in remote areas in Northern Luzon benefited from the center, an important hub for PILCD's work where they engaged closely with partners, and which is now unusable due to the severe flooding.

I thank our colleagues for the lesson in "perspective" and encourage you to celebrate this years ALW by helping them rebuild their centre.

Donations can be offered by:

1. Cheques made to 'PILCD' and mailed to 162 Friendly Homes Subdivision, BPI Compound, Guisad, Baguio City 2600 Philippines; or by

2. Bank transfers to the following account:
Account name: People's Initiative for Learning and Community Development (PILCD)
Account no: 40-70-00011-9
Name of Bank: East West Bank - Baguio Branch
Address: 77 Abanao St., Baguio city, Philippines
Swift code: EWBCPHMM

Sally Thompson,
CEO, ALA

(continued from page 1)

a good start; “On our first day a lot of women were accompanied by their husbands and coming to a local cottage rather than going to a big centre far away really helped.”

Trainer, Joanna Maxwell runs all



Trainer, Joanna Maxwell

the weekly sessions, bringing in specialist teachers for the social media and finance classes. The training covers all aspects of business planning, marketing, workplace health and safety as well teaching visioning and creative thinking, Joanna’s specialty. “Several students have said that the creative thinking had opened them up to a real sense of possibility,” says Joanna who runs a creativity and careers training business. “A lot of them aren’t familiar with questioning but have loved that part of the program.”

The sustained duration of the course has allowed friendships to develop that are not only enjoyable, but enhance learning. “What’s palpable in the room is the sharing between women,” says Joanna. “Most of my teaching is done through discussion as a group so we can share ideas and experience.” “It’s very communal,” agrees

Tonya. “To go from the first class which was silent, to ‘could you all please shut up!’ has been the most important part of the course.”

Not all students are new migrants. Others include longer-term migrants and under and unemployed women; women who are facing a range of challenges in accessing adult education. “I engineered that because I wanted the learning amongst each other. Different women have stepped up to become a role model in the group,” Tonya says.

“We always knew there’d be a large social inclusion component to the course,” says Joanna. “We have a very active Facebook group and every day there’ll be twenty posts asking for opinions on their business name or sharing a link, or I’ll put out homework in case anyone missed it.”

“We’re doing the structured



Jiraporn Temiyatanapong

component that gives them a Certificate III, but much of the real benefit and learning comes around the edges,” says Joanna. She describes a particular student who’s doing flower arranging; “She wanted to do a mother’s day flower stall from her garage, but decided it would be too much of a

stretch for her. We pitched in as a group and helped her deal with council and her neighbours and worked out how to do a flyer. I know several of the women came on the day to help her.”

Many of the women have degrees from their country of origin but have not been able to use those directly. “We’ve got engineers, botanists; a whole range of background degrees,” Joanna explains. “Some of their business ideas have come out of their academic backgrounds, but most have come out of their countries of origin—cultural clothing, food, importing spices. We’ve got someone who was an engineer in Indonesia but is now doing flower arrangements and teaching knitting. We’ve got Sahar from Egypt who wants to have a kid-friendly coffee shop with Egyptian sweet treats.”

Almost all of the women are expected to finish. “A few will be happy to just complete. Others will continue with their business plan and enter the workforce during the course,” says Tonya.

Both Tonya and Joanna attribute the program’s success to its robust support strategy; the mentoring, language support and childcare. “They’re more than add-ons,” says Joanna. “Once the women get over that first hurdle of contacting [English tutor] Anna and getting help, it gives them the confidence to finish their written assignments. Some of them have been working with Anna to write business letters or



prepare a survey for potential clients.”

The mentoring is focused on getting a business to actuality as well as supporting their learning and keeping on track with assessments. “The minimum mentoring hours is 10 but most will well exceed that,” says Tonya. “Everybody has different goals and needs different support strategies to meet them.”

The program was developed in response to real community need for home-based business opportunities for women. “These women already understand microbusiness but they need to know how to do it in Australia,” Tonya says. “I want to sell clothing—how do I do it? Back in my home country, you’d just pull a table out and set up on the street.”

“A lot of these women have not worked for some years because they’ve been raising families here and have done the whole migrant thing,” says Joanna. “Now their needs have changed and they want the kind of work that they can balance with a family.”

Both Tonya and Joanna are contractors with Sydney Community College, the lead partner in the project. (Sydney Community College has a history of running successful mentoring programs for migrants and won the ALA “Adult Learning Program of the Year” award for their Skilled Migrant and Refugee Mentoring Programs in 2010.)

Joanna suspects that there is a need for more of this kind of sustained, supported learning that falls between a short course and a formal program; “I think this bridges the knitting circle and the TAFE course, it’s delivered in a very flexible user-friendly way,” she says. “There’s

quite a few other microbusiness courses but they tend to be run as 2–3 week intensives,” agrees Tonya. “This is the only one that runs over a year with childcare and language support.”

There is definitely interest in running the program next year if funding is extended. “It’s certainly been one of the most joyous experiences of my entire life,” says Joanna. “I was so excited to connect with a group of people who really wanted to learn and were really appreciative of the opportunities in learning.”



Victoria Ladas

Single mother of one, Victoria, grew up in Greece and came to Australia at 21 with a diploma in fashion. She spent the next few years travelling back and forth (“I just did not know where my heart was”) before settling permanently in Australia.

Victoria came to the micro-business course after a long period out of the workforce spent caring for her son and elderly parents. She started mentoring students in a sewing group through a TAFE outreach program and discovered a passion for assisting others in developing their skills. When Tonya approached Victoria’s students about the microbusiness course, Victoria asked if she could do it.

“The first day was very, very quiet,” Victoria says. “Come the

third day, it did not stop and we haven’t stopped talking since.” Victoria’s dream is to hold sewing classes all around Sydney and develop a label for eveningwear and custom-made leather goods.

“The course gives women like myself a second chance. It gives us a space and a place where we can be ourselves share that common thread. We raised families, we made a great deal of sacrifice and now it’s time to look after ourselves. And we need that to develop; to be good mums and decent people in the community.”

Colleen Moutsos

Former legal secretary and mother of two, Colleen, is just about to launch her website selling gifts and jewellery online. “I just love handcrafting and finding beautiful jewellery pieces to share. I’d been thinking about doing something for myself for about six years,” she says. “The course just gave me the confidence to take the plunge.”

“The teachers have put together this really interesting package that’s very interactive and personalised. It’s okay to talk about the bad stuff as well as the good and it’s not overly formal,” she says. “I think it’s evolving for the teachers too, so they change things or see where the gaps are and respond to that.”

Having grown up in multicultural Earlwood, the course has given Colleen a whole new perspective on her local community; “I’m learning so much about these women; where they come from, what drives them and shapes them. I think they’re learning a lot from me as well.”



New Community Education and Training Website launched

Adult Learning Australia is proud to announce the launch of a dynamic new website specifically for our not-for-profit Registered Training Organisation (RTO) members.

The website was developed as part of a partnership project with NESAs, the employment services peak body. Its aim is to help Job Services Australia providers identify those ACE providers who offer accredited training for job seekers.

It's intended to be used as a partner to our Find A Course website—which includes all providers of adult community education.

Not-for-profit Community Education and Training providers offer a wide range of accredited courses, classes and learning programs to job seekers, employers and community members in their local area.

The new website provides a comprehensive list of not-for-profit RTOs offering courses and tailored solutions for job seekers and others interested in developing their skills for work.

Each of the providers listed on the website is a member of Adult Learning Australia. They share our mission of providing equitable access to Lifelong and Lifewide Learning for All Australians.

Community Education and Training providers or RTOs go by a wide variety of names including Community Colleges, Community Learning Centres, Learn Local Providers, Neighbourhood Houses, WEAs and many more.

All have these three things in common:

- They provide accredited VET qualifications.
- They are committed to local communities.
- They offer their programs in supportive adult learning environments.

Community Education and Training providers don't just support job seekers to gain skills for work. They offer community connections, social support and

encouragement. They are also experts at tailored solutions delivered at your venue.

The website offers updates on latest news, a members' forum and an easy search for your closest provider.

Please take a look at the new website at www.communityeducation.net.au



The banner features a teal background with a large, light-colored curved shape on the left. The text 'Community Education and Training' is written in a large, bold, orange font at the top. Below it, the words 'Supporting', 'Connecting', and 'Encouraging' are stacked vertically in a smaller, white, sans-serif font. In the center, there is a photograph of four young people (three women and one man) sitting around a table, looking at papers and writing. At the bottom of the banner, the website address 'communityeducation.net.au' is written in a bold, orange font. Below this, there is a dark teal footer section containing the Adult Learning Australia logo (a green stylized 'A' inside a circle) on the left, the text 'community Education and Training' in white in the center, and the words 'Lifelong' and 'Lifewide' in a white, italicized font on the right.

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Lifelong Learning = Resilient Communities

Byron Bay, NSW

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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.

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

Adult learning in Australia— The big picture

President of ALA, Professor Barry Golding will be offering a ‘big picture’ view of adult learning in Australia during his presentation at ALA’s national conference next month. Quest speaks with him about the fascinating and, at times, concerning trends he intends to discuss.

In your presentation for the ALA conference, you will be drawing on two recent UK studies that provide fascinating insights into the links between lifelong learning and its importance over the life course as well as across the community. Can you give us some examples of these links?

Australia is, in my view, in desperate need of a wide-ranging study of the case for lifelong learning. What we have tended to do as an adult learning community in Australia is react to a wave of government agendas that are not always based on sound research and are not necessarily in tune with the social and demographic changes that make our case for fundamental reform of the existing system even stronger.

The Learning Through Life study in the UK in 2009 emphasised the need to account for an ageing population, including the need to rebalance resources in education across the life course and life stages. It particularly emphasized the need to acknowledge that people’s learning needs change across these stages. Even a



Dr Barry Golding (right) and research colleague
Dr Antonio Fragozo

cursory examination of Australian government policies shows a lack of acknowledgement of the need for adults in mid-life to not only look for and develop work skills, but to develop skills to look after their families, and in later years, to learn to overcome the risk of social isolation, stay healthy and remain independent.

“There has never been a more important time for ACE providers and peak body organisations to unite and communicate the value of their work.”

In a parallel vein, the monumental, evidence-based study of mental capital and wellbeing as part of the UK ‘Foresight’ Project in 2010, similarly identified the need to account for the plasticity and receptivity of the brain throughout life; the multiple values associated with learning through life; the incredible importance for better

understanding the extent and effects (and huge costs across life) of mental health and ill-health and the impact of learning difficulties if they are ignored. Its main message is that learning is as much (or more) about wellbeing than it is about cognition, and that skills for work is only one reason to keep learning through life.

By contrast to the UK studies, the recent Australia’s country towns 2050 report and Australia’s Skills and Workplace Development Needs Discussion Paper makes no mention of adult and community education. Why do you think is Australia is ‘dragging the chain’ with regards to understanding and valuing the importance of lifelong learning and its links to wellbeing?

Leesa Wheelahan recently observed, when criticising the recent savage TAFE funding cuts in Victoria, that governments in Australia are currently enamoured with markets ‘as the best way to organise social life, including education.’ There is a fundamental lack of understanding about the social purposes and community benefits of learning in this market model. While paid work is one important outcome, to reduce education to a market where individuals only consume what they buy at work, and are

only encouraged to participate and learn while of working age is a very slippery slope.

Most Australians recognise the importance of learning in other critically important parts of their lives: to be happy to have an identity aside from work and to create multiple meanings across all life stages; to be aesthetic and practice religion and culture; to participate in a democracy; to contribute to the life of their children, family and community; to stay well and keep others around them well. It is important for ALA to provide evidence to governments in Australia of the incredible value of learning compared with its cost. A little spent on learning through the community reaps huge social, familial and community rewards, and saves on the huge cost of intervening with health and welfare services when things go wrong.

Education and training policies in Australia have a strong emphasis on market and skills-based education. Is 'wellbeing' simply too difficult to measure? Should public policy be concerned with maximising the wellbeing of individuals?

I agree that public policy should be for the public and community good, but am not sure it should just be for individuals, and certainly not just about work. When someone who is unemployed or withdrawn from the workforce re-enters the paid workforce, the benefits flow not only to the individual and the workforce (and to



Barry Golding (centre) with a group of Finnish men, outside a hunting lodge in Histijarvi, Finland, as part of his collaborative international research into men's learning and wellbeing.

Australia's productive capacity) in economic terms, but also to the economic and broader wellbeing of partners, families, children and communities, aside from saving governments money on expensive and acute public health and welfare interventions.

"A little spent on learning through the community reaps huge social, familial and community rewards and saves on the cost of intervening with health and welfare services when things go wrong."

Around one half of people of working age are unwell. Perhaps our public policy objective should be also about empowering adults to get and stay well. The idea that skills, productivity and work go hand-in-hand is at best only partly true. Unless adults are happy and well at home and in the community, and this includes people already in work, extra skills gained from 'training' may not help anybody, including industry.

We need to get beyond the idea that everything is about being skilled to get into work. Indeed one half of the working population has completed no formal training since school.

What is Australia's 'second tier' education system that has been identified in the OECD's PISA research?

While our schools do better on the

OECD Program of International School Assessment (PISA) than countries like the USA we are well behind world leaders in education like Finland, Korea and Canada and our tertiary system (higher education and TAFE) is similarly below first tier. Countries that do well in these international comparisons tend to have comprehensive 'all of life' education systems. Aside from the raw rankings, we are the only OECD nation whose PISA results have not improved (and in the case of reading, gone backwards).

Meantime one third of the adult population has such limited literacy skills, that they are unable to actively participate in modern society. These low literacy skills limit further the ability of adults to fully and productively engage in life and work. Without deliberate educational interventions, many of these low skills can become intergenerational. Meantime, as the Australia's Skills and Workforce Development Needs Discussion Paper (July 2012, p.11) makes clear, 'a significant proportion of Australia's total

current labour force is low skilled and may be vulnerable to job loss during a recession or to age-related displacement from the workforce.'

What does the ACE sector need to do to promote greater understanding of the value of its work?

Aside from being patchy, fragmented and sometimes unrecognised as a national sector, as in the Discussion Paper referred to above, adult and community education in all its forms is particularly vulnerable to a 'skills' and entitlement-based (read 'user pays'), market driven policy agenda. There has never been a more important time for ACE providers and peak body organisations to unite and communicate the value of their work, including through Adult Learning Australia, the nationally recognised peak body.

I believe we need a national report along the lines of the UK Learning Through Life report, that clearly articulates the multiple values of learning lifelong and lifewide, and sets the agenda for improving the increasingly limited opportunities to learn at any age, regardless of assets or income. If the ACE sector also becomes a market, those who are typically already educated and employed will be able to afford to learn. If public provision is to become a reality, we need to unite to convince governments at all levels of the cost savings aside from the expense. Parallel to this, we need more emphasis on professional training and payment of adult educators, as exists in all top tier educational nations.

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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/

Managing the inclusive classroom

21 September 2012 1.00pm

Presenter: Judy Buckingham

The days of educating learners with a disability in segregated settings are long gone. Today people with diverse abilities come together in mainstream learning environments. This shift in attitude around how people with disabilities should be educated has resulted in what is now referred to as an 'inclusive classroom'.

In our next session, Judy Buckingham from the ACE DisAbility Network will discuss:

- the inclusive classroom
- the impact of disability on learning
- strategies to meet these needs
- behaviour management
- useful learning tools, including collaborative learning, working with support workers and assessment.

ACE DisAbility promotes disability awareness and provides advice, support and training in the Adult and Community Education sector.

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 will be awarded in 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

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= Resilient Communities

Byron Bay, NSW

11th and 12th October, 2012

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contact ALA on 03 9652 0861
or visit

www.ala.asn.au/conference

To print or not to print?

Quest speaks to two ACE organisations about the dramatically different approaches they have taken to this issue.

Sticking with print

"The WEA printed Course Guide is still the biggest marketing tool the WEA employs," says Charlene Darmadi, Marketing Manager, WEA, Adelaide. "We do a print run of around 490,000 Course Guides five times a year, which totals two and a half million guides annually and takes up around 80% of our total marketing budget."

Darmadi attributes the success of her brochures to an eye-catching cover ("to ensure that it doesn't get thrown out with the junk mail") and comprehensive information listing courses, fees and all other pertinent details.

"Web enrolments always spike at the same time our Course Guide is distributed. So as long as we can still track this relationship, the printed Course Guide is likely to stay."

While the WEA has not yet started using QR codes (something that is starting to be seen more commonly in the US,) they have increased their use of learner stories and photos in the guide, both of which particularly appeal to Gen Y learners. "Over the past four years or so the WEA has made a conscious decision to feature the people of the WEA, both tutors and students," says Darmadi.

With the rapid rise of online marketing many adult education providers have begun to ask—do we still need to produce a printed brochure? Trends from the US show that print brochures continue to out-perform the alternatives and encourage more frequent online purchasing, but many others believe that print brochures are a thing of the past.

"We regularly use quotes from students, and on occasion use learner stories. "We always try to fit in more photos as it generally helps the course it is advertising."

"The online Course Guide has a large but secondary role at the WEA," says Darmadi. The majority of WEA enrolments are now done online. "While some people will use a direct search online and enrol that way, we know that the

printed guide is still the catalyst for these enrolments. So people are picking up their guide and flicking through it as they enrol

WEA adult learning **Course Guide**
September - November 2012

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Image from the Sydney Community college website

over the web. Web enrolments always spike at the same time our course guide is distributed. So as long as we can still track this relationship, the printed Course Guide is likely to stay.”

Moving to digital

“We were leaders in brochure design and distribution for a long time,” says Garry Traynor, Principal, Sydney Community College (SCC). “We produced a course guide four times a year with individual photo shoots for each term. It was costing us \$250,000 annually.”

Midway last year, SCC took the decision to totally abandon the printed course guide and move to a weekly email newsletter. “The production of the print guide became a juggernaut in itself,” says Traynor, “and it nailed you down to a specific timeframe. Once you’ve printed something with dates, it’s static. You can’t fix it if things change.” Traynor likens it to owning a Supermarket. “Imagine closing the doors for five weeks while you stock the shelves,” he says.

At the beginning of the year

they printed a small course overview designed to drive people to the website for further details. “Our website delivers 1.5 million page views per year and is totally dynamic. That’s the place where we expect people to be connecting with us,” says Traynor.

The other significant change is that they have moved from a four-term year to a rolling program. “It’s partly about moving to digital media, but it’s also about meeting buyer demand,” explains Traynor. “Our core short course business is being etched away by niche private providers, such as local yoga centres. Part of the reason for losing the brochure is to reduce the inflexibility of the programs we’re offering. People don’t like to wait around. They don’t want to be locked into a four-term year.”

A key factor behind these changes has been the dramatic downturn in all enrolments and the overall viability of the College itself. “We couldn’t continue doing business in the same way,” says Traynor. “We didn’t take this on lightly but it was

something we were forced to do. A quarter of a million dollars would have bankrupted us easily by now.”

“The day of printed material is very limited. My only question has been; did we wait too long?”

It’s too soon for Traynor to assess the outcome of the new approach. “The results aren’t going to be known straight away. To date we are meeting budget targets, but we are not out of the woods yet,” he says.

Traynor believes that the print brochure will soon become a thing of the past.” If you want to do a course, where do you start? The answer is usually the internet. That’s where the research process begins. The day of printed material is very limited. My only question has been; did we wait too long?”

Traynor’s bold step has been met with great interest from the broader sector: “because everyone knows how much it costs to produce a brochure.”

Long serving CEO of WEA honoured on Queen's birthday list

The WEA in Adelaide is one of Australia's most successful ACE organisations and Denis Binnion was at its helm for almost 20 years. This June, he was made a member for the Order of Australia in the Queen's Birthday Honours list.

Denis Binnion became involved in adult education in the 1970s teaching evening classes in history for the University of Adelaide and the South Australian Institute of Technology. He joined the WEA in 1979 as a course programmer in language and liberal studies.

Whilst CEO, Denis established WEA Travel, a licensed travel agency that has been conducting Australian and overseas study tours for 24 years. He has personally led dozens of group tours with up to 40 participants at a time to India, Sri Lanka, Egypt, Canada, Peru, Argentina, Chile and New Zealand and brings a background in cross-cultural studies and history to his work and travel.

Denis has sat on the Minister's Advisory Council on ACE and the South Australian ACE Council. He was an ALA national board member representing South Australia for a short time and was active in the South Australian branch for 20 years. In his retirement he still leads WEA overseas study tours and runs



Dr Dennis Binnion AM

regular one day and weekend historical tours of rural areas in South Australia.

Quest reflects with Denis on his career in adult education:

South Australia has one of the strongest ACE sectors in the country? What do you think has contributed to its development?

South Australia is fortunate in that the WEA has been a major provider of ACE since before 1920. Perhaps because of the

example of the WEA many other smaller providers have been keen to enter the field. So, in one, sense the WEA has provided a good example of what can be achieved with relatively limited resources provided you have community support and interest. In another sense, the WEA has had a nurturing role in providing support to new groups and access to tutors. The state and local governments have also been strong in partially funding and encouraging neighbourhood houses and neighbourhood or regional level provision.

WEA is the largest not for profit, non-government adult education organisation in Australia with around 35,000 course enrolments annually. What can others in the sector learn from its success? What has it done so well?

The WEA celebrates its centenary in 2013. To survive for so long it has always had to have a flexible approach to changing conditions of funding, educational needs and social aspirations. It has constantly changed with the times.

Continued page 16

ALA welcomes Ursula Stephens

We are delighted to announce that Senator Ursula Stephens has agreed to join Adult Learning Australia as an Ambassador.

Ursula has been a Senator for NSW since 2001 and Parliamentary Secretary for Social Inclusion and the Voluntary Sector since 2007. Before entering parliament, she was involved in adult and community education, after training as a primary and special education teacher. Her passions are community development, adult and community education, social justice and environmental issues, and she has been actively involved in grassroots movements in these areas in Australia for more than 30 years.



Ursula Stephens and Greg Peat

recipe, or write a new short story. I've always promoted learning circles and opportunities because it's through sharing and learning that we grow as people and discover that the world isn't all about us, but about relationships, networks and the friendships that can sustain us in tough times.

I enjoy sharing that sense of achievement and encouraging others to find the great pleasure in learning that I get.

I became involved in community education in the 1970s. I was teaching in Tennant Creek and studying special education.

Thank you for becoming an Ambassador for Adult Learning Australia. What do you hope to bring to the role?

Thank you for inviting me—I'm very honoured.

First I want to champion the value of lifelong learning. Not just for older people, but for all of us. We live in such a rapidly changing world—not long ago few of us had heard of Twitter or Facebook, now its adult Australians who are the largest users of social media. So we can only try to imagine the world we'll be living in in 2020 and the new skills and knowledge that we'll need.

I want to be able to meet with some of the people who are really

making a difference in adult learning in Australia. We have great practitioners, researchers and, of course, adult learners working quietly away, and I'm looking forward to the chance to support and affirm their work.

You've had a long-held passion for adult and community education and served on the board of Southern Region Community College for many years. What initially attracted you to the sector? What has kept you there?

Fundamentally, I really enjoy learning new things. I love those "ah ha" moments when the penny drops, or when I manage to produce a reasonable patchwork effort, or a new

At the same time, we had two children attending the local community childcare centre and I became involved in the committee. We had some dramas about a blocked drain in the children's toilets and had to find some money and support to get it sorted. At the time people didn't know where to start and I realised then the importance of building capacity in organisations to be able to lobby, write submissions, funding proposals etc. None of the Committee members had done that before, so we started searching for some guidance to help us do that and couldn't find much.

Eventually we resolved the blocked toilet, but the outcome really was a short program

auspiced by the Arts Council for community groups on exactly those issues.

About 20 people came to the workshop. That was the basis of a fledgling community learning program in Tennant Creek.

We're so lucky in Australia that we live in a society that values education and I think we must never lose sight of the fact that education is not just about 'skills' for working—we also need to promote learning for life. For me, that means promoting lifelong learning from the time young people are at school. Whenever I'm visiting high schools I remind students that there's only so much that can be crammed into a school curriculum—and the most important things are the skills that set them up for learning and living life beyond school. I encourage them to try to be critical thinkers, to read widely, to try new things and to widen their circle of social contacts by getting involved in the community where they live.

I remind them that we have an amazing life in Australia—that other people aren't so lucky, and that we need to explore how other people live to understand Australia's place in the world.

So in the adult and community education space that means learning about and understanding changes that are happening in our world. Some of our learning will immediately relate to changing circumstances and what we might say is 'our need to know.' At other times though, we need to nourish our souls and enrich our lives by going outside a comfort circle and experiencing unknowns—volunteering to support the homeless, or supporting a community group that can benefit from our expertise; cultural experiences that help us

to understand the experiences of others, and sharing our wisdom and experiences with them, so that they can understand more about us. Adult learning is always a two-way street.

In Australia, some states have a much stronger ACE sector than others. What are the roles of the state and federal governments in strengthening ACE? Why do you think this has not been approached more consistently across the country?

I've seen many changes in the way in which ACE is treated in my decades of involvement. We have policies to ensure young people stay at school longer and have greater choices, including vocational skills, that a generation ago, would have been catered for at TAFE or in a community college. We have had a generation of Australians who have been able to access higher education as mature aged students, thanks to the reforms of the Whitlam Government. We have so many opportunities today for e-learning and workplace training. So, systemically, the investment in ACE has been in two directions: second chance learning and formal support for those who need access to specific vocational skills as part of industry restructuring—workplace learning.

What falls through the gaps is the notion of 'learning for growth'—which becomes about busy people being able to take some time to do just that. And that is no longer the purview of the formal education sector.

So now we're seeing the emergence of a very vibrant movement in the Men's Sheds, in heritage committees and historical societies, in healthy ageing groups, in grandparents

groups where adult learning principles underpin the work they do together. Environmental groups including Landcare are grounded in strong educational programs, as is the SES, Out of Home Care, and the myriad of health related support groups.

In many ways we're seeing a return to self-help groups, supported by governments at all levels.

Why is it not supported consistently across Australia? I think ACE is still a 'contested area of education' and governments wrestle with the challenge of where best to invest public monies for the greatest impact. The COAG decisions have been to invest in early learning and school education. That is being reinforced by the Gonski Report, which has highlighted the massive under-investment in school education that needs to be addressed.

An early report about this issue identified ACE as the Cinderella sector. I think for ACE the challenge is to rethink that perception; to take a strengths-based approach; to map the learning that's happening in communities and to stimulate engagement in learning in new ways. The government's social inclusion agenda is one that focuses on engagement—the challenge for ALA is how to capture the social return on investment in adult learning and provide that information to decision-makers.

Welcome to ALA and we look forward to working with you.

Thank you. I look forward to working with many in the sector to strengthen awareness of the work ALA does.

“Just a very special person”

Tribute to Jack McDonell

25.2.26—10.8.12

The staff and board of Adult Learning Australia were deeply saddened to hear of the passing of former ALA board member Dr John ‘Jack’ McDonell on the 10th August 2012 in Prahran, Melbourne.

Born 25th February 1926 in Bendigo, Victoria, Jack was made an Awarded Member of an Order of Australia in 1994 for his work in lifelong learning.

Jack attended University High School and received his PhD in Physics from the University of Melbourne in 1950. After several study tours to Europe, he joined the physics staff at Monash University, Melbourne, in 1961. He became the Founding Director of the Centre for Continuing Education in 1973.

Jack was one of the founding fathers of the U3A Melbourne and also co-founded the Australian U3A Online Australia in 1998 with Dorothy Braxton and Rick Swindell.

“He’s left a brilliant adult education legacy,” says Rick who worked closely with Jack until he ‘retired’ four years ago. “His contribution to adult education will persist for years.”

“He was just a very special person,” recalls friend and colleague, Dorothy, “When you were organising a conference, you always said ‘you’ve got to get Jack!’ ”

Jack was on the board of the CAE (College of Adult Education) and was instrumental in setting up an organisation for university and continuing education agencies—The Standing Committee on Adult & Continuing Education in Higher Education.



Jack was valued on the ALA Board for his sharp mind that questioned constitutional matters on a number of occasions. He primarily worked around older person’s needs and represented seniors at a time when sectors were represented as Board members.

Jack was on the Board when increased funding provided for the appointment of the first Executive Director of ALA. He retired from Monash University in 1989.

Jack’s other awards included Fellow of the Institute of Physics (UK), Fellow of the Australia Institute of Physics and Vice President, Federation of Australian University Staff Associations (1960–62).

Jack made a significant contribution to adult education in Victoria and Australia. Many people from the sector count it a privilege to have known and worked with him.

He was the much-loved husband of Win, father of Ken and Russell and father-in-law of Colleen and Lorraine. Loved by seven grand children and six great grand children.

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:

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- 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 Blackboard Collaborate training room

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

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



**Adult
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Lifelong and Lifewide Learning
for All Australians

(Continued from page 12)

Perhaps change is the one constant! The WEA has always been focused on student needs and willing to experiment with new programs and new educational provision. It has also been willing to admit when new programs are not successful and to drop them quickly. You have to be quick to respond and adapt in ACE to survive.

You also have to constantly experiment and make sure you have a broad range of programs and activities so that as one area of provision declines you can expand some other area. You have to keep abreast of all social and community changes. The WEA has also managed its finances well; been careful with expenditure but also committed to advertising well and ensuring that it has the best educators or tutors available.

In your extraordinary career, what have you learnt about adult learning? Why are organisations like the WEA so important?

Adult learning can and does transform lives although for most people it just enriches them. Over the years I have been amazed and pleased to see adult students progress to being adult educators or tutors where they first started learning. I have seen people grow amazingly in confidence and change the course of their lives through new careers, new relationships or by adopting a new world vision. This above all else is the reason why ACE providers are so important in society. They give people a second chance or new hope and new aspirations. ACE is about change, the future, hope and optimism.

"I have seen people grow amazingly in confidence and change the course of their lives through new careers, new relationships or by adopting a new world vision. This above all else is the reason why ACE providers are so important in society."

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