

## Learning on the road



WEA travel group visiting Bagrati Cathedral, Georgia.

Educational tourism is booming. But it's not new in Australia's adult education sector. The WEA in Adelaide and Sydney have a long history of offering courses where students travel with a tutor on trips from Egypt to Estonia, Greece to Greenland.

Vic Costi went on his first educational group tour with Adelaide WEA in 2005. It was his first group tour and his first trip to Vietnam.

'It was an absolute eye-opener. It was a fantastic way of catching up on all that I'd missed. The pre-tour

lectures and talks, and then the guides who had so much insight into the culture helped me discover this rich history that goes back thousands of years. When I came back I was a walking ad. I told everyone I knew.'

That first trip ignited a passion Vic didn't know he had. A high school science teacher, Vic had had little background in geography or history. 'I've got a hunger for history. When I got home I read a lot about Vietnam's ancient imperial past and I wouldn't have done that unless I'd been on that tour.'

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## Message from the CEO

In this edition our Board members describe what they have learnt about Adult and Community Education in 2014 so I thought I'd share some of the things I've learnt.

I recently undertook some research into literacy practices in some Victorian neighbourhood houses. I learnt that as more government services are moving online growing numbers of adults are seeking help from neighbourhood houses, community learning centres and community colleges with increasingly complex online texts. Most want individual personalised support. However, funding models usually only cover larger and larger literacy classes. This type of disconnect between the preferences of individuals and families and top down funding models is common in education and seems to be growing as the voices of learners and educators are driven out of the policy discussion.

A very welcome exception is the recently announced Personal Support Program funded by the South Australian Government. This four-year pilot offers one-on-one mentoring and support to those who have previously found it difficult to study or find work. It's great to see governments funding personalised bottom up approaches and working with the local peak body, in this instance, Community Centres SA.

We recently released a research report on Indigenous intergenerational learning. One of the striking messages from the report was the sheer volume of high quality grassroots intergenerational literacy programs operating in communities across the country that struggle to get the recognition they deserve. If top down commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities were to connect with these grassroots programs, then enormous benefits could be achieved.

This year I followed with interest the debacles following the marketisation of Vocational

Education and Training in many states – the ultimate in one size fits all approaches. What I learnt from this is that for many people, education, including basic literacy, is not a human right but a commodity to be bought and sold on the open market for private profit. The impacts on individuals, families and communities of channelling millions of taxpayer's dollars from the public purse for private profit are still being felt. ALA has been working with other advocacy groups to support learners who have been ripped off by these dodgy providers.

Finally, my best wishes to the adult education teachers, administrators and volunteers who spend much of their time trying to make 'square peg' learning fit into the 'round holes' of government policy and funding trends. It can be exhausting work. I hope that through *Quest* that we have highlighted the value of your work and celebrated your many achievements.

**Sally Thompson**  
CEO

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Learner turned tour leader Vic Costi in Patagonia.

Travelling as a group and with a focus on learning offers a much deeper experience of a place, Vic says. 'I'd done quite a bit of travelling and I'd been to Europe as an independent traveller. I didn't know it at the time, but I missed out back then because I didn't know about the culture and history.'

He's recently returned to European travel, this time as part of an educational tour and with a different perspective. 'Even though I had a lot less time there than I had previously I got more out of it. In the past, I could never figure out why some of those European states were always bickering. Now I know that it all comes back to historical events and the phenomenal architecture and artwork that you enjoy as a tourist has been accumulated through plunder.'

He's since done another 11 tours including Eastern Europe, the Baltic states and Spain, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Borneo, China, Africa,

USA and South America. He's since added Antarctica to his list. 'I can now say I've set foot on every continent on earth.'

He finds it hard to name a single highlight. In Borneo he saw orangutans in the wild, and China was 'a phenomenal learning experience' because the tour leader had lived there for years.

Vic's currently fascinated with South America. 'The history fascinates me. In Peru the imposition of Spanish religion, education and culture almost wiped out indigenous culture but that's now being recovered. We can learn a lot from the way indigenous people in Peru interact with their environment. They respect the land and the rivers and it's tied to their ancient religion. It's in complete contrast to the Spanish who raped the land, mining it for silver and gold. It's really made me reflect on my own attitudes and my relationship

to the environment.'

He's planning his next trip as a tour leader taking a group of students to the Ecuadorian Amazon and the Galapagos Islands. For Vic it's an exciting prospect, combining his interest in biology, the outdoors and natural history.

Bob Stone has been a tour guide with the WEA since 2001 when he was invited to help run a trip to Egypt. He's got a PhD in archaeology and is Senior Trench Supervisor at the Pella archaeological site in Jordan where he's volunteered for the last 17 years.

Bob says a tour leader who knows and loves the region you're visiting makes all the difference. 'My job isn't to take you to the right shops. It's to take you off the beaten track and open doors to aspects of a culture or a country you might not have seen otherwise.'

That might mean having your photo taken with a wedding party in a village in Armenia, or sitting down in







a family home in Morocco to share a local meal.

Planning an itinerary that will offer new experiences to a group is easy for a tour guide, Bob says. 'None of us are going to recommend places we don't want to go to or things we don't want to do,' Bob laughs.

He's just back from a 23-day tour of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia with a group of 21 people who he said were well travelled but wanted a new adventure. 'They wanted to experience new customs and new sights and they got it in spades.'

In preparation for a tour, Bob does an enormous amount of reading and information gathering. He writes a booklet for the group including historical and cultural information and gives a 3-hour public lecture about the region. The aim is for participants to be reading and thinking and asking questions about a place before they visit. This enhances their enjoyment and appreciation when they see it first hand.

The attitude of participants has a lot to do with the success of a tour too. To get the most out of an educational tour Bob says, participants need to actively participate. Something as simple as learning some words and phrases of the local language can make a big difference.

'Even if they don't speak the language I always say "Have a

try. Even if you make a pig's ear of it, the person you're talking to will really appreciate you trying to communicate.'"

Group members also bring skills and knowledge that add to the trip. On a recent tour to Vietnam, one of the group members was a veteran returning for the first time. 'He was there to get rid of some devils, and it was quite an emotional trip for him. But he gave us great insights into the place.'

Another tour member, a professional jazz pianist, staged an impromptu concert in the hotel lobby, drawing in a crowd of hotel staff and tourists who sang along, made requests, and got thoroughly involved.

As the guide Bob also has to keep track of the details as well as being flexible. 'I have to check if hotel rooms are OK, buses arrive on time, and that I've got a good relationship with the local guides. It's hard work running a tour. Not everyone in the group wants to do the same thing at the same time, so I have to be able to accommodate everyone's needs.'

It can be stressful. 'I always lose weight on a

tour. Sometimes there are conflicts in the group that you have to smooth over. Occasionally someone gets sick or overestimates their physical capacity and has trouble keeping up. Or someone will go shopping and get lost while we are all waiting for them at the bus. But by the end of the tour you've forgotten all those things.'

'It's a lot of work but I wouldn't do it if I didn't love it. It's great to share my love for a place, to introduce others to the people and the history. I get a thrill when I see people get something out of it, that's a real reward.'

When the tour group arrives home there's a letter waiting for them that includes details of their next meeting. 'We get together and have some wine and food and I do a presentation incorporating photos and highlights of the trip and people have a real sense of accomplishment when we do that. Sometimes we plan where are going next. I've already got some signed up for a trip to Iran in April 2015.'

<http://www.wea-sa.com.au/>  
<http://www.weasydney.com.au/>



# Developing business models for community organisations

**Finding alternative sources of income is an increasing pressure in the adult and community education sector. Working out how you're going to make that added cash can be a challenge. Here are our tips on developing a business idea.**



- 1.** Shift your mindset. If you continually refer to yourself as a Not for Profit organisation it can be hard to imagine yourself running a business that makes money. Try calling yourself a For Purpose organisation or a Social Enterprise to better reflect your position.
- 2.** Be prepared to invest time and effort in planning and testing your business idea.
- 3.** Keep your target market in mind. Many businesses fail because the people behind them focus on what they want to sell rather than what people want to buy. It's like opening a cake shop because you love to bake rather than thinking about what your customers might want.
- 4.** First work out your business model. Leave the detailed business plan until later. Ask yourself how you are going to sell your product and make money. What customer problem or challenge are you solving? Who will pay? How much? How often? And what portion of every sale will be profit?
- 5.** One strategy for developing a new business is to make the most of the expertise and knowledge you've got in your organisation and promote it to a new market. Think about what skills and knowledge people have in your organisation that could be sold elsewhere. For example, could some of your classes be revamped and rebranded to appeal to members of your community with more disposable income?
- 6.** When you're looking to reach a bigger market ask yourself who in your community has money to spend; what problems do they have and how can you solve those problems? You might identify that residents of an upmarket retirement home who are less mobile but active online might be interested in IT training and support.
- 7.** Consider partnering with agencies or organisations whose capabilities complement yours.
- 8.** Test out your business idea before you launch into it. For example, if you are thinking of adding a coffee shop to your venue and your research indicates there's a demand, hire a coffee machine and set up a small scale version first.
- 9.** Take your team along with you. Sharing ideas and measuring progress keeps everyone on track and committed to developing the next phase.
- 10.** When you've established that your business model is a winner, start on your business plan.

These tips are based on a recent ALA webinar by Robyn Logan.

Photo credit

'Australian coins and notes' by.. [Martin Howard / CC-BY 2.0.](#)



# What I've learned about Adult and Community Education in 2014

Our board members share their insights.



## Barry Golding

I've learned that the great work we are doing at ALA: our policies, publications and advocacy, are not only valuable to members but noticed and greatly appreciated around the world. We punch well above our weight, considering the small amount governments spend on ACE in Australia, and on ALA in particular.

As neo-liberal agendas make other forms of education drier, more vocationally oriented and expensive, our case and advocacy for learning for many other purposes, lifelong and lifewide, becomes even stronger. I've discovered ACE is sort of like a spring. When compressed, it bounces back even stronger.



## Mark Brophy

One of my favourite Einstein quotes is 'The more I learn, the more I realize how much I don't know.' At the end of 2014, here is what I don't know:

- Why there is still no national policy, strategy and dedicated funding for the ACE sector in this country
- Aside from the success of Men's Sheds, why there aren't more government supported programs that help build literacies and promote social inclusion
- Why we still make the priority in this country just VET or higher education. We are more than just what we do in a job or what formal qualifications we've attained
- Why some public service regulators treat tiny and small not-for-profit, community driven, low risk ACE providers exactly the same as huge multimillion dollar, Stock Exchange listed private RTOs that blatantly seek new ways to rip off the system.

As long as these issues are not addressed – ALA has a purpose.



## Catherine Dunn

This year I became a student in ACE myself. In my 36 year professional life, I worked on projects with ACE providers, referred students to classes and wrote and reviewed government ACE policy – always a step removed from the real thing. I retired at the end of 2013 and have revelled in the chance to enrol in things I loved learning as a teenager.

I have been delighted to discover that what I used to promote about the benefits of adult learning really is true. Fellow students come from all walks of life, encouraging each other, and the teachers recognise and work with the different skills and backgrounds of us all. Many students start off very nervous about how they'll cope and fit in, but are soon learning and laughing and making progress they're proud of.



## Paul Mulroney

I've been involved in providing professional development this year to ACE practitioners in South Australia helping them to understand and apply new compliance requirements associated with the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF).

For a lot of them this is a real challenge because it means rethinking the way they teach their classes.

In one recent session a group looked at how to integrate formal oral communication skills into a cooking unit. They managed to come up with really creative and surreptitious ways to encourage learners to practice formal language skills during the class without sacrificing the friendly, collaborative and engaging atmosphere they and their learners value. I've learned lots from these sessions but overall I've learned once again how creative and imaginative ACE teachers are.



### **Belinda Dolan**

In the words of Leonardo De Vinci 'Learning is the only thing that the mind never exhausts, never fears and never regrets'.

What I have learnt is that I am grateful to be in a position to be able to enable and promote lifelong learning both nationally and internationally.

As a body and a member of the board we need to continue to provide access to learning which in turn promotes a socially inclusive Australia. The challenge and my largest learning for 2014 and beyond is how we can embed both informal and formal learning into every day life in order to provide a knowledge rich environment for our current adult population and for the younger generations who will soon become the adult learners of the future.



### **Rob Townsend**

Adult and Community Education is a very diverse sector and although there have been trying times in most states of Australia around funding, I have learned in 2014 of the continued resilience and innovation of many ACE providers and educators. Also what we call ACE is changing and diversifying and so it is not a discrete 'sector' as it once was.

We need to embrace the many different forms of organisations, formal and informal, that are facilitating lifelong learning in communities for adults. We need to embrace the many generations that are now participating in learning and adopt practices that suit learners across the life-course.



### **Trace Ollis**

This year I have been inspired by the learning that goes on in the public pedagogies movement. I refer to education that occurs outside the confines of formal institutions, such as museums, libraries, art galleries, neighbourhood houses, community education centres, campaign groups and social movements.

These spaces of education make an important contribution to local communities and are often funded through the unpaid work of volunteers. They are important in promoting understanding about, civics, citizenship and democracy.

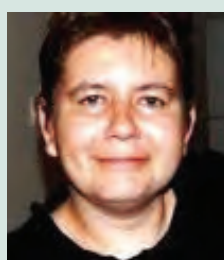
My particular Christmas wish is for neighbourhood houses to receive guaranteed funding and recognition for their important work.



### **Dorothy Lucardie**

Working this year with colleagues in Australia and the Asia South-Pacific region to review the Education For All and Millennium Development 2015 Goals and to provide comment on the development of the new world Sustainable Development Goals for 2030 has demonstrated to me that the voices of local communities can be heard on the world stage and can produce significant change.

I hope that in 2015 our local communities across Australia are able to find their voice and use their power to communicate the importance of adult learning and Adult and Community Education to Australian governments and insist on access to learning opportunities that are lifelong and lifewide.



### **Kathryn Gilbey**

I have a lifelong passion for learning and education so I'm pleased to be a part of an organisation that promotes lifelong learning. I find that I'm learning more and more about ACE as I go along.

Because I am relatively new to this sector I am learning heaps, quickly. My experience has been in adult education in remote communities in the Northern Territory so it's been fascinating for me to get a look at the diversity of the adult and community education sector around Australia.



# Community choirs sing from the heart



KenSingers. Photo by Elizabeth Schiavello

When she arrives at Kensington Neighbourhood House on Wednesday nights Gregoria is always tired out. For the 41 year-old, Wednesday is the busiest day of her working week at the University of Melbourne.

'I'm a bit of a workaholic,' Gregoria says. 'By the end of the day I'm totally drained, but then I come along to choir and I'm totally regenerated. I go home on an absolute high.'

KenSingers kicks off at 7.30 pm. Each session includes vocal exercises, something old to practise and something new to learn for the choir's repertoire.

The choir is a mixed group with people aged from 19 to 69, men and women from all walks of life.

Tom, 19, is the youngest member who joined because singing offers a good contrast to his full time studies in computer programming.

Anne, 69, joined after her husband died. 'It was lovely to get out of myself and away from grief and sing with an open heart.'

Choir director Jo Windred leads the group in some warm-ups and the group circle the room limbering up their voices, flexing their vocal chords and making a happy racket. What's obvious watching this group is that any worries or tiredness is left at the front door. With their heads back, eyes closed and mouths open in song you can see how good singing makes people feel.

Since the 'Choir of Hard Knocks' made community choirs famous, they have mushroomed around Australia. Often auspiced by local community organisations including neighbourhood houses, community choirs involve a lot more than just encouraging people to sing.

There's growing evidence that being part of a choir does more than simply make people feel good. Forming new friendships, developing networks in local communities; improving confidence and getting jobs are just some of the benefits of singing with others.

Monash University's Associate

Professor Jane Southcott has conducted research on the benefits of being part of a community choir.



Vocal warm ups





‘Singing makes you feel good, it’s a very uplifting activity, but it also improves your cognitive skills, as well as your physical wellbeing. It gives people pleasure and brain research shows that singing is good for your overall attitude and happiness.’

Singing in a choir can be very liberating too. ‘No one asks what you do or who you are. You’re all just there to sing. You’ve all got something in common.’

Being part of a choir is a great informal learning experience. ‘There’s lots to commit to memory, you’re memorising new songs and practising old ones. A lot of conductors don’t assume you can read music so you can learn by listening to recordings. It’s very informal teaching that focuses on developing people’s confidence.’

Jane’s research has found that the most successful choirs are those supported by a community

organisation that offers the kind of practical support that keeps the choir going – from rehearsal and performance space to advertising in their newsletters.

And the benefits go both ways. Each time a choir performs in public it spreads awareness of the centre that hosts it as well as inspiring other members of the community to think about taking up singing.

KenSingers perform at community events from school fetes and festivals to workshops to community events. Choir members are constantly learning with master classes, big sings, workshops and visiting guests.

For Gregoria it was not a public performance that got her interested in joining a choir but the Kensington Neighbourhood House brochure that arrived in her letterbox. ‘I’d loved singing as a child and I missed the joy singing used to give me. The description of the choir in the brochure was so friendly and inviting that I thought, “This is for me.”’

[www.kensingtonneighbourhoodhouse.com](http://www.kensingtonneighbourhoodhouse.com)

## Research has found that singing in choirs can:

- Help people feel connected to and included in a community
- Improve people’s sense of wellbeing
- Build confidence
- Build respect and trust
- Offer a voice to sometimes silent or marginalised groups
- Offer a chance for people to excel, feel a sense of achievement
- Improve cognitive function
- Heal communities affected by trauma
- Improve the ability to learn a new language
- Offer respite from grief and loss
- Help people meet new people and make new friends

## A 2013 survey of community choirs found that:

- Australia’s community choirs have an average of 37 members, rehearse 43 times per year and perform an average of 11 concerts per year.
- Almost all community choirs give their time to the local community, with three quarters giving free concerts and even more performing at community events.
- There is a gradual increase in choir participation with each age bracket, 45–54 year olds being most likely to sing in a choir.
- More than half of all community choirs receive some form of support from local government, 13% receive support from state governments and 5% from the federal government.

Source: [http://musicinaustralia.org.au/index.php?title=Community\\_Choirs\\_in\\_Australia](http://musicinaustralia.org.au/index.php?title=Community_Choirs_in_Australia)

# Encounter with literacy



Practising reading signs

is 'Go for it. I hadn't taught people with disabilities before so I was a bit unsure and worried before I started. But once you've established that there's a need for a program like this, it's a matter of getting alongside the students and getting to know the sort of things they respond to, and they will let you know what they need.'

Leonie says it's been a pleasure watching students blossom. 'The students are so responsive and so wanting to learn. And I've got this wonderful team of volunteers. I just love my job.'

<http://encountercentre.com.au>

On Wednesdays the 'Adult Literacy for People with a Disability' class begins with a walk through paddocks and gardens surrounding the Encounter Centre in South Australia's Victor Harbor.

'We always start the day with exercise because it stimulates the brain and our students really enjoy it,' says Leonie Mathews, co-ordinator of the Centre's adult literacy program.

On an average day, 20 people arrive aged from 18 to 60 years. They're a diverse group – some have intellectual disabilities, others have acquired brain injuries through strokes or accidents.

After the walk, the formal learning begins. Students write in their journals and talk with a tutor about what they've done during the week. This helps to develop their vocabulary and their reading and public speaking skills.

Some are shy about talking to the group. Leonie says encouraging students to present on a hobby or interest – whether it's quilting, making model ships or fishing – breaks the ice. 'It's something they know and are interested in so it's safe and they don't have to talk about themselves directly. The

students just love it. They listen closely to one another and ask questions and they share really useful information with the rest of the group.'

Improving communication skills and acceptance of one another is as important as improving literacy skills, Leonie says. 'Some of the students can be quite self-absorbed so learning to pay attention and be considerate of others is important. Smiling at people, offering to help, or thanking someone for something they've done might seem like small things, but they are big steps for some of our students. They've learned to look out for each other.'

Having a 'wonderful' group of 15 tutors working one on one and catering to the individual needs of students is what has made the program so successful Leonie says. 'We're all on the same wavelength and we get together at the beginning of the term to brainstorm and explore ideas, change the classroom set up, and decide on the best approach with individual students.'

Leonie's advice for centres establishing a similar program



Using computers to develop literacy



Professor Jack Mezirow, Emeritus Professor of Adult and Continuing Education at Teachers College, Columbia University, died in New York in September, aged 91.

Jack Mezirow was committed to understanding adult learning from the learner's experience and he is best known for his influential 'transformative learning' theory of adult learning, which was partly inspired by watching his wife return to university as a mature age student.

In contrast to the prevailing view of adult learning at the time that emphasised the mastery of basic skills, Mezirow's theory focussed on the potential of learning to transform an adult's understanding of self, beliefs and behaviours.

Professor Mezirow published many articles, books and research reports on adult learning and transformation theory.

In 1998, he created the International Transformative Learning Conference and at the 2014 conference in November an inaugural award was established in his name.

'Jack Mezirow will be remembered for many things, most especially, his scholarship, his passionate commitment to social justice and social action and his overall joie de vivre. He will be sorely missed,' said Professor Elizabeth Tisdell, former Chair, AAACE's Commission of Professors of Adult Education.



Jack Mezirow's theory was inspired by his wife's experience as an adult learner.

Full obituary on Jack Mezirow:

<http://www.tc.columbia.edu/news.htm?articleID=9698>

## What's your new year's resolution?



Want to learn new skills in 2015, feel more supported in your work and meet like-minded people? You can have all this by joining ALA or renewing your membership for 2015.

By becoming a member of ALA you are instantly part of a professionally diverse network of people who value the importance of Adult and Community Education for all Australians.

As an ALA member, you will

be represented by the national voice for Adult and Community Education in Australia. ALA advocates for the importance of lifelong and lifewide learning at both state and federal government levels through policy development, submissions and research reports, and membership of government bodies.

Other benefits you'll enjoy include:

- A variety of professional development opportunities to support you in your work including forums, webinars and workshops
- Access to the latest research and best policy and practice on Adult and Community Education through the Australian Journal of Adult Learning (AJAL)
- Latest news of developments in

Adult and Community Education, member initiatives and stories through our quarterly magazine, Quest

- Membership of a vibrant and engaged community of people who understand and articulate the voices of adult learners in Australia
- Links to like-minded peers around Australia. Our specialist networks link up people working with people with disabilities and those working in language, literacy and numeracy (LLN)
- Ability to share your organisation's work through our publications, social media and websites.

Join us and support lifelong and lifewide learning across Australia. We offer rates for individual or organisational membership.

<https://ala.asn.au/join-now/>

Photo credit

'Happy New Year' by [Rajwinder Singh](#). / CC-BY 2.0.

# Freya's a winner



**Adult  
Learning  
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Lifelong and Lifewide Learning  
for All Australians

**AUSTRALIAN  
TRAINING  
AWARD**



Congratulations to Freya Merrick dos Santos from Yarraville Community Centre who has won the Excellence in Language, Literacy and Numeracy Practice Award at the 2014 Australian Training Awards.

Freya says she was both surprised and delighted to win. 'My jaw dropped when they announced my name. There weren't many small community organisations like ours represented amongst the finalists so it was great to get that recognition. Organisations like ours are doing it quite tough. We do it with a lot less but we do a fantastic job.'

Inspired by her work with displaced young people in Timor Leste, Freya works with unemployed migrants, refugees and internationally displaced people at Yarraville Community

Centre, helping them develop language, literacy and numeracy skills that will allow them to more actively participate in their community.

YCC co-ordinator Chris McCall says Freya was nominated for the award because of her creative and innovative teaching and the value of the work she does.

Freya currently teaches the highest level Skills for Education and Employment (SEE) class at Yarraville. Learners in the class are preparing to make the transition to work or further vocational study. Freya works with the class on employability skills but also arranges work placements or volunteering opportunities so that students can practise employability skills in real life situations.

[www.australiantrainingawards.gov.au](http://www.australiantrainingawards.gov.au)

AUSTRALIAN JOURNAL OF  
ADULT LEARNING

Have you or your organisation got some research to share? The *Australian Journal of Adult Learning* (AJAL) is a leading journal that publishes articles to advance debate about theory, history and new practices in adult learning.

AJAL has been published for over fifty years and covers a wide range of topics of interest to those interested in adult education. AJAL publishes both refereed and non-refereed articles and our editor welcomes contributions.

AJAL is now calling for papers for a special issue on Public Pedagogies for the November-December 2015 issue. Submissions close 30 May 2015. For more information contact [charmankaren@gmail.com](mailto:charmankaren@gmail.com)

## About Quest

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