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U3A: 40 years of lifelong learning, connections and friendships

When the University of the Third Age (now known as U3A) started in 1984, it is unlikely that anyone was predicting that in its 40th year, there would be over 260 groups across Australia meeting the needs and interests of more than 100,000 members.

But that is what is happening now - every week, across the country, groups of older Australians are getting together in their local areas to learn, meet, create, listen and connect.

And all helping to achieve U3A's vision to promote the benefits of positive ageing and lifelong learning to people's mental and physical health and social engagement.

All U3A groups are volunteer run and managed locally with classes and activities based on needs and interests of the members of each group. News and information about different groups and networks is shared to members through a National quarterly bulletin and in turn a State Network and Local U3A communications initiatives.

Groups get together in community centres, libraries,

neighbourhood houses and other local facilities, sometimes alongside men's sheds and other community organisations. In Glen Wall's local network, 760 members meet in 18 different venues.

A long-time U3A member – like most attendees are – Glen is currently Chair of U3A Australia, the movement's umbrella organisation, and a member of the U3A Network Victoria Committee of Management.

Glen says that many people over the age of 50 come to U3A to continue their lifelong learning journey through classes which teach such topics as arts, craft, languages, genealogy, health and wellbeing, history and the like; while others come to learn new skills, including to keep technologically connected, or hobbies such as crafts and art.

There is also a very strong component, he says, that get health and wellbeing benefits through taking part in Tai Chi and other exercise activities – line dancing is always popular! And, equally as important to group convenors, is the provision of time for a coffee and chat at the end of sessions because so many people are

(Story continues on p. 3)

Message from the CEO



'Digital literacy is crucial for Australians to remain engaged and avoid being left behind in an increasingly digital world.'

Recently, I was interviewed on ABC radio about a new report highlighting the serious impacts of the digital divide on job seekers. The report revealed that a significant proportion of middle and mature-age respondents felt they lacked the necessary digital skills and confidence to maintain employment. Additionally, 90% of those surveyed believed there was insufficient human interaction in the recruitment process. Furthermore, one in five respondents reported not having access to reliable internet, and nearly half lacked easy access to a digital device such as a PC. Digital literacy is crucial for Australians to remain engaged and avoid being left behind in an increasingly digital world.

These findings are no surprise to ACE (Adult and Community Education) providers, who understand that the digital divide, coupled with low levels of literacy and numeracy, compounds additional barriers for people who are often already disadvantaged. This includes individuals with disabilities, those with low levels of education, limited employment history, and people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.

ACE can help unlock the potential in adults who might need extra attention and support to pursue or continue their learning, whether it is digital or otherwise. ACE plays a vital role in fostering lifelong learning opportunities and addressing the diverse needs of adult learners at all levels, particularly those who need to learn how to learn and build self-confidence in local community settings, with smaller group classes and links to wraparound support services. However, ACE remains on the fringe of the skills, training, and education sectors - often overlooked and underfunded despite its immense contribution to adult education, training, and skills development.

The report also indicates that Australian workplaces have seen a 12% increase in demand for digital skills since 2016, and by 2026, there could be a shortfall of more than 300,000 workers with the appropriate digital skills.

Adult and Community Education (ACE) offers numerous benefits that extend to individuals, communities, and society as a whole. Overall, ACE plays a crucial role in fostering personal growth, economic development, and social inclusion, making it an invaluable component of our society.

But now, something to celebrate! We are preparing for Adult Learners Week across Australia from 1 to 8 September. This year's theme is 'Take the Journey,' and we are excited to embark on this journey into learning with you to transform lives.

Inside, you will find some great tips and tricks for holding your events – please post them on our events section on our website and share your socials with us. We can't wait to see what new ideas, events and activities you have. Don't forget to put forward your fabulous learner nominations for our ALW scholarships.

Finally, I would like to welcome our new Board members: Kerrie Akkerman from South Australia, Tim Catteral from New South Wales, and Piper Rodd from Victoria. We are excited to have you on board and look forward to your contributions.

Sadly, we bid farewell to Chris McCall, who has served on the Board for nine years. Chris will be greatly missed by many. I would like to extend a personal thank you to Chris for the support and mentoring she has provided me over the years.

Looking forward to sharing ALW 2024 with you and making it a memorable week.

Jenny Macaffer
CEO



Glen Wall and Beryl Clarke

(story continued from p. 1)

also there for the social interaction and connection.

Some attendees have returned from retirement to paid work after gaining new skills, while others who had never picked up a paint brush before have found their work in art exhibitions.

With each group focused on providing activities which meet the needs of their own local older people, a lot of each group's program is co-designed with participants. Glen says that many groups find that the success of a class or group will lead to a new program.

U3A members – who are around 70% women and 30% men – pay an annual fee of around \$60 per year, with occasional extra expenses such as when a bus is required to attend an event or activity.

Glen says U3A's volunteer model also works on encouraging about 10% of members to become tutors who are willing to share their experience and knowledge with their peers.

Glen took on such a role early on in his U3A journey and now teaches technology for seniors once a week.

“There was one group of 10 people who had all written material that they decided they wanted to self-publish, so an e-publishing class was set up to guide them through the process. Ultimately, two books were published so that was a great achievement for everyone involved”
- Glen Wall

He is also working with RMIT University and research staff to develop a program where U3As could provide “technology cafes for seniors” designed to give members support to remain online and avoid the isolation which affects many older people who haven't developed or kept up such skills.

This program would promote the benefits of people being able to take part in telehealth appointments and activities which keep them connected and engaging with others.

As with all community organisations, the COVID pandemic had significant impact on U3A, with a 10% drop in membership resulting. However, Glenn says, that this has been fully recovered in the years since. During lockdowns, most groups made the transition to Zoom so that they could assist in keeping people connected and participating in a range of classes and activities online.

Lifelong learning and teaching make for colourful lives

Noelene Jardine and Beryl Clarke have both followed the U3A trajectory from class participant to tutor and now co-run Art for Fun classes, which usually attract about 20 people each session.

Beryl joined U3A when a new group was set up in 2002. Finding out about the program, she immediately decided “it was definitely for me”.

Having then recently retired as a nurse and nursing teacher, Beryl was initially involved in classes relating



Beryl's award-winning artwork.

to desktop publishing and PowerPoint before rediscovering enthusiasm for art through the Art for Fun classes.

Today, at 92, she provides group members with monthly classes on watercolours and general painting principles. And she plans to keep being involved “for as long as I possibly can”.

She and Noelene complement each other beautifully, with Noelene providing participants with the benefit of her expertise working with acrylic paints.

“We ask the students what they would like to learn about – at the moment it is how to paint feathers – and then usually Beryl will do a class about watercolour painting of feathers and then at another class, I will show them with acrylics,” said Noelene.

And while the emphasis of the classes is fun, group members often enter works in local art exhibitions and shows, with many of these works being sold. Last year, group members entered 13 paintings in the Whittlesea Agricultural Show and won eight awards!

Noelene, who initially joined U3A as a way to meet and

connect with people after moving back from a long stint living in Sydney, says that “people have to get out of their houses and communicate with other people”.

People who love art, she says, get the additional benefits of inspiration and encouragement from other group members. “Most people also find art quite therapeutic. You can get into the zone and find it quite relaxing”.

When teaching nursing, a psychologist colleague told Beryl about the SPICE of life activity model. Sometimes modified by different groups, Beryl says she takes this acronym as encompassing the social, physical, intellectual, cultural and environment activity you need in your life, particularly at an older age.

“Everything I do, including with the classes, is based about making sure you have this spice of life approach. You can vegetate so easily, but if you don't do that, you get so much more from life.”

<https://u3aaustralia.org.au/>

CAN LEARNERS FIND YOU?

Our **Find a Course** directory lists over 1000 not for profit Adult Community Education (ACE) organisations.

ala.asn.au/find-a-course

If you wish to list your ACE organisation or need to update your details, email info@ala.asn.au and we can help you.

Beryl says she never misses an opportunity to tell others about the benefits of lifelong learning. “I'm absolutely an ambassador and tell everyone I can about U3A and about how important it is to do something”

School for seniors gathers and keeps people engaged



Mary Veldhuis has been convenor of the Launceston School for Seniors for the past five years and has never found it hard to find an interesting and willing speaker.

Run through Libraries Tasmania's Adult Education program, School for Seniors provides an opportunity for older people, usually retired, to meet and hear from volunteer guest speakers.

Speakers at the now monthly get-togethers cover a range of topics, including health and wellbeing, travel, technology, history and writing.

Mary says that there is usually around 90 people enrolled in the program, with some having attended for more than two decades. A two-person Committee shares responsibility for arranging speakers and the other any necessary technology.

"We have had some great discussions and speakers, so I think everyone knows that they will enjoy being there".

"Most of the people who come want to keep their minds active and have the social interaction. There have been lots of friendships made over the morning tea we provide each time and people see each other outside of the program as a result" - Mary Veldhuis

Long-time member, Peter Fawcett, became aware of School for Seniors about seven years ago when an "oldies" entertainment group he is in was booked to entertain for the Rosny group.

"The format seemed good, so I joined in 2018. At Rosny, we have covered History & Heritage; Travel infrastructure and members' travelogues; Science and Environment; Cultural/Social events and traditions; Social/Community issues; Personal development, preparedness and progress, including aged care, of course."

Peter, now 82, qualified as a structural engineer in the UK and worked as a designer on large-scale projects before transitioning to become a university lecturer in architectural technology and science, firstly in the UK and then here in Australia.

Having retired from paid employment 24 years ago, Peter remains busy with owner/maker/manager projects.

Peter says that the program provides opportunities for "constructive conversation" in a "relaxed and friendly atmosphere".

At the June meeting, Dr Ted Vidor made a return visit after his previous session on medical treatment options was very well received, while in July, Julie Frost presented on convict orphans.

In August, members are looking forward to the opportunity to hear a violinist and cellist from the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra perform and talk about their musical careers.

<https://adulthoodeducation.libraries.tas.gov.au/course/SFSS1>

ADULT
LEARNERS
WEEK

1-8
SEPT
2024



TAKE THE
JOURNEY



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TAKE THE JOURNEY

1-8
SEPT
2024

This year's Adult Learners Week theme, Take the journey, aims to encourage adults of any age or stage in life to think about how many educational opportunities are available to them. Adult Learners Week highlights this huge range of learning opportunities.

Adult and community education is for everyone, including people who struggled with learning at school or haven't been involved in education for a long time

Adult and community education provides learning opportunities in safe, friendly, flexible places in local communities – learners don't have to go to a university or a large organisation to learn – they can join local groups near home.

Adult learning is about connecting with other people and developing the skills and confidence to be part of local communities – it can help with physical and mental health and wellbeing.

Adult education and learning can also help people transform and adapt to some of the challenges they face in a rapidly changing world, particularly in relation to changing technology.

Developing new skills can mean people can enter the workforce, return to work, change jobs or explore new careers.

Learning can help people overcome barriers created by not being able to read or write or speak or write English.

Adult Learners Week is aimed at encouraging people of any age or stage in life to consider how many opportunities there are along the journey to gain further education and skills.

By highlighting the huge range of creative, inspiring,

fun, and practical learning opportunities available in communities across the country, Adult Learners Week aims to entice people back to learning no matter their age, background, or previous educational history. This initiative emphasises the power of education in reshaping lives and opening new possibilities.

Meeting new people, feeling a sense of belonging and achievement, and discovering new self-confidence are just some of the positive side effects of taking the transformative journey into learning as an adult.

Register events

Open days, come and try sessions, online classes, awards ceremonies — whatever your planned activities for Adult Learners Week, register your events on our website to have them promoted nationally.

Be an early bird and win a cash prize

Organisations which register their events before 7 August can win 1 of 20 \$200 prizes to cover costs. Three \$1,000 prizes will be awarded for the best events at the end of the week.

Nominate a learner

Stories about students whose lives have been turned around by adult education are inspirational to others. Enter an adult learner with an inspiring story for an Adult Learners Week scholarship before 27 August. Nominee stories will be shared across social media and winners will be announced during Adult Learners Week.

Check out the Adult Learners Week website and Facebook page

Find ideas, tips and tools for sharing and making your #ALW2024 celebration a success.

www.adultlearnersweek.org

www.facebook.com/adultlearnerswk/

Ten tips for exploring this year's ALW theme: Take the journey



1. Make a list of what you'd love to learn

Whether it's playing the violin, learning a new language, changing careers or going back to school, write down what you would like to learn.

2. Make a plan

Think about how you can engage or re-engage with learning. Break each step into achievable goals and set yourself a timeline.

3. Do a skills audit

List all the things you've learned already. Identifying what you already know can help you pinpoint gaps and build confidence in being able to learn more or in different ways.

4. Look for inspiration

You'll find many people who have decided to switch gears, change their lives, and pursue their dreams through adult education. Talk to someone you know who learnt something new as an adult or seek out other people's stories, like this one about singer [Karise Eden](#) returning to finish high school after winning The Voice.

5. Discover learning opportunities

Start with what's on offer in your neighbourhood. Browse informal or formal classes, courses, workshops and activities. If you've been away from education for a while, try something that's fun to get yourself into the swing of learning again.

6. Identify barriers

Pinpointing things that might be holding you back is the first step in overcoming obstacles. Low self-confidence, fear of failure, or lack of information about what's available can inhibit you. Talk to someone you trust about what's stopping you and how you can tackle these barriers.

7. Find a learning buddy

Having someone to share your learning experiences with can keep you motivated and on track to your goals. Regularly checking in on how you are both going is a great way to stay focussed and committed.

8. Set up a learning space

Find a comfortable spot where you feel relaxed and alert. Having a space dedicated to learning can help you develop the habit, whether it's at home, or somewhere like your local library.

9. Make learning fun

Try listening to an audiobook or a podcast on a topic you'd like to know more about or watch videos that can teach you how to do something more efficiently. Being creative and trying a variety of channels is stimulating and fun.

10. Document your progress

Keeping track of how you're going and what you've achieved is a great way to build your confidence to take even bigger steps. And you can inspire others. Take a photo of yourself learning something new and post it on social media with the hashtags #ALW2024 #TakeTheJourney

A legacy of Learning

Former ALA President and Vice-President, Chris McCall, retired from the ALA Board at this year's AGM after completing the maximum nine-year term. We took the opportunity to talk to Chris about her long sector experience.



Now managing the Yarraville Community Centre as it approaches its 50th anniversary, Chris is the embodiment of a learner who found her niche through the adult and community education sector. When Chris was a teenager, her goals were to leave school and move out of home. Once she had done that, she did office work before having a 12-year break to raise her children.

Re-entering the workforce, Chris was initially employed six hours per week in reception at the Yarraville Community Centre. She then 'started to develop an interest in learning for the first time'.

'The wonderful thing about adult and community education is that you can start learning, or return to learning, at any stage of your life or career and there will be options for you. I decided I didn't want to be an unskilled worker again and wanted to look at a career instead.'

Chris started with non-accredited courses around community development and adult education before, ultimately, going to university to complete a Graduate Diploma in Community and Further Education. Before undertaking the Graduate Diploma, Chris considered studying to become a counsellor. However, she decided that adult and community education was what interested her more.

'I was intrigued by all the opportunities available in local communities for adults returning or starting to study. I could see real opportunities for people to steer their own path to learning in non-threatening, very friendly environments.'

While Chris fully supports options for people studying to build skills and gain employment, it is the 'broader aspects of adult and community learning' that she loves.

'People can come in and out at different stages of their lives — when the time is right for them — and they can learn skills for employment and life, such as computer literacy, or learn knitting, art, or exercise. And once they've done short courses, they can then see what else might be on offer.'

Chris says that the sector has 'come a long way' since she first became involved, with adult and community education now 'much more valued by governments and communities'.

'It is a great space for people who may face barriers to learning or may not be ready or want to go to a TAFE. Adult Community Learning Centres provide a local and safe community environment.'

Chris also loves that community learning centres, like Yarraville, 'reflect the broader community outside' and, as a result, provide programs and services that meet their needs.

'They are a microcosm of their communities and provide holistic programs, not just learning opportunities. At Yarraville, we offer food relief and a book library and a kitchen where people can learn and share food and time together.'

Chris joined the ALA Board in 2015 and would 'absolutely' recommend nominating for an ALA Board position to others in the sector.

'It was terrific when I was voted in as I got to see all the great work being done by our peak body in advocacy and research. I also came to understand a national perspective and to work with some highly skilled people on the Board. I have learned a lot from the others, particularly those with a really deep background and knowledge in research.'

Meet our new board members



After many years' governance and management experience within the adult education sector, NSW-based **Tim Catterall**, has recently become an adult learner himself. And the good news is that his current study of teaching literacy in adult and vocational education won't take him away from the sector!



Tim's roles have included being CEO of the University of New England's vocational education provider, UNE Partnerships, and Adult community education provider Tamworth Community College, and a director on the

boards of independent schools, Adult Community Colleges and Youth and Adolescent services providers.

While working in the community colleges sector, Tim worked to assist adults and young people, particularly in regional communities, to address challenges relating to language, literacy, numeracy, digital skills and employability skills (LLNDE).

Currently CEO of Community Centres South Australia, **Kerrie Akkermans** is passionate about the ability of adult and community education to assist the most disadvantaged in society to access learning.



Kerrie has more than 20 years' experience as a Board Director and C-suite executive in both the not for profit and corporate sectors. She is a member of the South Australian Training Skills Advisory Board and the

Australian Neighbourhood Houses and Centres Association (ANHCA) Board.

As a qualified trainer and educator in business management, strategic development and literacy

foundation skills in RTOs, Kerrie also has a hands-on understanding of the needs of the sector.

Dr Piper Rodd is a dedicated lifelong educator committed to social justice and critical pedagogy.

A Lecturer in the School of Education at Deakin University, Piper's areas of teaching and research examine the years beyond compulsory schooling for young Australians, with particular focus on social class and social justice.



Piper has had professional experience in the school, TAFE and university sector workplaces and has always sought out opportunities to collaborate with community organisations.

She is also Chair of the Board of Future Connect, the Local Learning and Employment Network for Brimbank and Melton in Melbourne's west.

And congratulations to ALA Vice-President, Kिरrily Loveday, who won the Gold Heart of Innovation using Technology Award at the 2024 TAFE Directors Australia Recognition Awards.

ALA President, Kathleen Priestly, congratulated Kिरrily who, she said, had redesigned TasTAFE's Foundation Skills Services to increase learner access and equity, build student skill and success and ultimately increase the foundation skills of the Tasmanian community.

Kathleen said Kिरrily had done so with great support from other passionate TasTAFE staff and teachers.

Member round-up



TAFE NSW is running a short course to help people understand their smart devices better. The popular short course was built out of demand identified in literacy classes. Randwick campus literacy teacher, Sally Hodgson, spoke to the Reading Writing Hotline about this student-driven short course. tafensw.edu.au/course-areas/study-and-career-pathways/courses/statement-of-attainment-in-understanding-digital-devices--900-82057

Registrations are now open for the 2024 Community Colleges Australia conference in Sydney from 21 to 23 October. Conference sessions will focus on how can community education providers can adapt, innovate and create resilience in our uncertain world. https://events.humanitix.com/community-colleges-australia-2024-annual-conference?mc_cid=b4014353cf&mc_eid=d2096b1baa

Save the date for the Canberra Institute of Technology open day on 13 September. The day will be of interest to people thinking about taking up adult education, giving them a chance to meet teachers and discuss opportunities. Registrations are open now.

cit.edu.au/citevents/cit_open_day_2024

Sunshine Coast Libraries is looking for presenters for its Lifelong Learning workshops. Individuals, community groups, organisations, artists, and educators are all welcome to apply, with preference given to people living locally. Eligible applicants can present their ideas for proposed workshops, which have so far varied from small space gardening to wearable art and bike repairs. library.sunshinecoast.qld.gov.au/whats-on/calling-all-workshop-presenters

Through a community collaboration, Right to Work NSW has brought together 16 young people to create more than 30 training videos about employability skills. The Employ e-Library project brought Right to Work NSW together with the Lieder Theatre and the Snow Foundation. The videos are part of Right to Work NSW's work to achieve its vision of a 'world where young people of all abilities are valued and empowered to experience employment success and inclusion'. Watch this great video here: facebook.com/reel/442777678210798



Behind the scenes of Right to Work's 'Employ e-Library' project

Join now

Being a member of ALA is a great way to support lifelong and lifewide learning in Australia and join a thriving national network of adult educators.



ACE Update

After previously working for the South Australian government, John King has taken up the role of Managing Director of the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER). King said he was 'looking forward to working closely with the NCVER team, Board, Members, and all VET stakeholders in supporting vocational education with evidence'. Board Chair, Dr Ruth Shean AO, said John's experience and knowledge in policy and data would be key attributes. ncver.edu.au/news-and-events/media-releases/new-managing-director-for-ncver-2024

The Tasmanian Government's Lifting Literacy Implementation Plan 2024-2026 aims to ensure that all Tasmanians can benefit from the 'social and economic benefits of literacy'. The publication outlines the core principles underlining the government's approach, which include ensuring that everyone has opportunities to access support to develop literacy skills through evidence-based structured (systematic and explicit) literacy teaching. dpac.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0014/330044/Lifting-Literacy-3-year-Implementation-Plan.pdf

A new report by the Future Skills Organisation (FSO) and Mandala Partners has identified VET qualifications in marketing and communications, conveyancing and insurance broking may be most impacted by AI. The report draws on the FSO's previous research that identified the potential AI impact across the finance, technology and business sectors, as well as the types of skills most likely to be affected. The FSO is working to identify the highest priority areas for training providers and industry to ensure VET qualifications reflect economic needs. futureskillsorganisation.com.au/building-an-ai-enabled-workforce-priority-framework

Read Write Now is looking for volunteer adult literacy tutors who can plan and lead lessons that have been driven by student feedback and needs. The WA-based organisation looks for tutors who can create a relaxed and inclusive atmosphere through respect, enthusiasm, instilling confidence and a sense of humour. Tutors receive induction and training before being matched with a student. <https://read-write-now.org.au/help-others/tutor-role>

The Melbourne Athenaeum Incorporated, Victoria's first adult education provider, is celebrating its 185th anniversary. Opening in 1839 as the Melbourne Mechanics' Institution and School of Arts, the organisation provided educational and library facilities for the wider community, self-improvement and self-help. A membership library still exists today which offers author talks, book launches and musical performances. melbourneathenaeum.org.au/

Visit our website to find previous issues of Quest and individual stories for sharing. ala.asn.au



QUEST

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