



L-R: Keir Paterson, CEO, Neighbourhood Houses Victoria, Jenny Macaffer CEO ALA, NMLL CEO Cliff Rundle and ACEVIC Executive Officer Nina Bekker.

# QUEST

ISSUE 1 2025

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## A beloved learning centre under threat

**A much-loved and well-utilised adult education provider in Melbourne is facing an uncertain future because it is located on the ground floor of one of the first public housing towers scheduled to be demolished.**

Youmei Xi originally came to North Melbourne Language and Learning (NMLL) to learn English after migrating from China. She loved the local centre so much she stayed on for other courses before becoming a volunteer. Youmei now comes in to help recent migrants, including making sure they know that the Centre provides community members with air-conditioned spaces during severe or extreme heat.

"There are so many good people here. I enjoy being helpful and making friends," she said.

In September 2023, then Victorian Premier, Daniel Andrews, made a surprise announcement that Melbourne's 44 high rise public housing towers were to be demolished and redeveloped by 2051.

Built between the 1950s and 1970s, the Premier said the towers – which housed about 10,000 people – would be replaced with new homes that met contemporary building and sustainability standards.

Social housing across the sites, he said, would increase

by 10 per cent, with affordable and market homes also available.

The first of three sites earmarked for redevelopment is 33 Alfred St in North Melbourne – which has been home to North Melbourne Language and Learning (NMLL) since it was set up by residents and community agencies in 1989 to provide English language classes.

Providing relevant and easy to understand information about services, NMLL, like so many other adult education providers, quickly became a vital resource in helping residents connect with local agencies.

Yang Youjian is learning English at NMLL, after moving from Northern China. As well as finding his English teacher, Rosie, to be "very kind, experienced and highly dedicated," Yang is receiving support from Sam, another NMLL worker, to explore how he can have his Chinese qualifications recognised in Australia.

In the decades since opening, NMLL has become a Registered Training Organisation, a Learn Local centre and a Neighbourhood House, continuously expanding its education, training, and community development programs to empower culturally and linguistically diverse communities in the area.

(Story continues on p. 3)

# Message from the CEO



**At our Annual General Meeting (AGM) on May 16, keynote speaker Kelly-ann Tansley will address the critical intersections of domestic violence, adult education, and social justice, emphasising the power of education in breaking cycles of disadvantage.**

2025 marks a significant year for ALA and the adult learning community. We celebrate our 65th anniversary, 65 years of the Australian Journal of Adult Learning (AJAL), and 30 years of Adult Learners Week (ALW).

These milestones remind us of the incredible contributions adult learning has made to individuals and communities across Australia. However, this year also presents challenges, from political shifts to global uncertainties, reinforcing the urgency of our work in advocating for lifelong learning.

One key event shaping this year is the upcoming federal election. ALA is committed to putting forward a strong, positive vision for adult learning, ensuring that policies reflect the needs of all learners. Our 2025 pre-budget submission highlights the essential role of lifelong learning in providing security, stability, and opportunity for everyone.

This year also brings a transition for AJAL. We bid farewell to long-standing editor, Associate Professor Trace Ollis, who has guided the journal with dedication and insight since 2018. We warmly welcome our new co-editorial team, Dr Piper Rodd and Dr Cheryl Ryan, who will shape AJAL's future, ensuring it remains a leading voice in adult education research.

Global shifts are also affecting the adult education landscape. Recent US developments highlight the increasing politicisation of research and education. The US Education Department has announced a 45% funding cut, limiting their ability to collect Australian research journals, including ours.

Additionally, American researchers collaborating with Australian universities are now subject to ideological scrutiny, facing questions about compliance with restrictive policies on diversity, gender, and international partnerships. These developments serve as a stark reminder of the importance of defending academic freedom, critical thinking, and access to education free from political interference.

At home, we continue to work with organisations like North Melbourne Language and Learning (NMLL), which is being impacted by the redevelopment of high rise public housing. Ensuring that community-based learning remains accessible, particularly for marginalised groups, is at the heart of ALA's mission.

We also celebrate the contributions of volunteers who enrich adult learning programs. Amanda's story highlights the transformative power of literacy and numeracy education, and the vital support of volunteers in learner journeys. This reminds us that learning is not just about acquiring skills but about building confidence, agency, and belonging.

In a time of uncertainty and division, the values of lifelong learning—diversity, inclusion, and informed decision-making—are more crucial than ever. Education is the cornerstone of democracy, empowering individuals to think critically, engage with diverse perspectives, and navigate complex social issues.

As we celebrate our milestones, we reaffirm our commitment to advocating for lifelong learning as a fundamental right and a pathway to a more just and equitable society.

Thank you for being part of this journey. Together, we will continue to champion adult learning and community education.

**Jenny Macaffer, CEO**





(story continued from p. 1)

Over the past seven years, more than 750 English as an Additional Language (EAL) students have attended classes, and more than 3,000 people have participated in pre-accredited courses. Last year, alone, NMLL enrolled students from 30 countries, speaking 13 different languages.

NMLL also provides free 24/7 Wi-Fi, arranges a fortnightly food market providing free fresh fruit and vegetables, and runs workshops on water safety, CPR, domestic violence, legal rights, and compulsory voting. Well-attended seminars cover topics such as women's health, men's health, voting and pathways to employment.

During her visit to the centre, Jenny Macaffer said, "NMLL is an essential part of this community, providing not just education but also connection, support, and opportunity." She added, "Its location ensures residents have easy access to learning and vital services that help them build better futures. Maintaining NMLL's presence in North Melbourne is critical for the many people who rely on it every day."

At the end of September, NMLL must vacate its current premises and source alternative accommodation without any ongoing rental assistance from the Victorian Government. Up until now, the Centre has had access to concessional rent because of its benefit to the local community.

CEO Cliff Rundle says that commercial rental rates would be "prohibitively high for a not-for-profit organisation like NMLL".

What particularly worries Cliff and the Centre's staff and volunteers is that the possible closure of the Centre will happen at a time when the local population is growing and new and planned social and private housing will significantly increase the need for adult and community education and services.

"Current and future students would no longer be able to improve their English and digital literacy skills in an affordable and accessible way and there would no longer be the range of community events," Cliff said.

Vietnamese-born Tran, below, moved to North Melbourne from nearby Ascot Vale after a fall left her unable to work or manage a two-bedroom flat.

Attending NMLL on Tuesdays and Thursdays helps prevent her from "staying in my flat all the time, which would be very bad." She has made "so many friends" and learned skills she never had the opportunity to develop before.



Cliff says that student numbers remain high in 2025, showing that NMLL's services are just as vital as ever. He, along with staff and volunteers, remains hopeful that when they close their doors in September to the current centre, they will be able to assure current and prospective students that a new nearby home awaits.

**"Closing NMLL will have negative repercussions for the local community now and in the future". CEO Cliff Rundle**

# 2025 - A year of anniversaries

**2025 is a huge year for Adult Learning Australia**



**"Congratulations to Adult Learning Australia on 65 years of being a dynamic and consistent leader in adult education. "**

**- Debra Cerasa, CEO, Amplify Alliance**



Not only are we celebrating our own 65th anniversary – it is also the 65th anniversary of flagship research publication, the Australian Journal of Adult Learning (AJAL), and the 30th anniversary of Adult Learners Week!

We look forward to letting you know more about how we are celebrating these milestones.

The theme for ALA's anniversary is *Celebrating 65 Years of Excellence in Adult Education: Renewing Futures, Empowering Communities*.

Originally established as the Australian Association of Adult Education (AAAE) in Hobart in 1960, we amalgamated with the Australian Association of Community Education in 1989.

In 1998, the name Adult Learning Australia was adopted to reinforce our central focus on learners and the range of informal and non-formal ways in which learning can take place alongside formal education and training systems.

## Celebrate with us!

As part of our 65th anniversary, we are gathering 65 messages to celebrate.

We are going to include these messages in our social media and collate them as a record of our sector in 2025.

We would love to receive a short message from you (up to 100 words) in response to the anniversary or our theme. Send to [comms@ala.asn.au](mailto:comms@ala.asn.au). We would also welcome an image.

*Thank you to all our Quest readers for being part of our journey and celebrations!*



**"ACOSS warmly congratulates ALA for reaching such an incredible organisational milestone. We applaud and recognise ALA's effort to ensure that all people, especially those experiencing poverty, disadvantage and hardship, have equitable access to lifelong learning". Edwina MacDonald, Chief Strategy Officer, ACOSS**



# Getting adult students out of survival mode and into learning



Amanda visiting the Dublin Adult Learning Centre

**In February, Amanda Wilson spoke about how to reduce educational fear among students in our first webinar for 2025.**

Amanda Wilson became a volunteer adult literacy tutor in 2011 when Libraries Tasmania put out a call for tutors in northern Tasmania.

Volunteering in her local library, Amanda came to see how helping adults improve their reading and writing skills can change lives, particularly when they can then access new opportunities for better employment, health, and community connections.

Amanda completed training in tutoring adult learners and has always been an active participant in her regional professional development program for literacy tutors. She is also a member of Adult Learning Australia (ALA), the Australian Council of Adult Literacy (ACAL) and Neurodiversity and LLN Communities of Practice.

In 2022, Amanda was curious to find out more about how to reduce feelings of educational fear. Amanda visiting the Dublin Adult Learning Centre, had seen the negative impacts of educational fear on her learners, including them feeling embarrassed, anxious, and stigmatised.

“Educational fear is often the result of poor previous educational experiences, and it then has such a negative impact on how the person is able to learn.”

“Unless learners can feel calmness and less anxious, learning is much harder and more frustrating. And the learner is then more likely to stop attending.”

Amanda said she wanted to be able to understand more about educational fear and how to reduce its impacts. Particularly as it seemed clear that it can affect all learners regardless of their age, gender, or situation.

“Looking back now, I can see in the way many of my learners behaved when they called in sick or were flustered when trying a new activity that educational fear was probably the reason.”

Amanda applied for a Churchill Trust fellowship which would allow her to explore evidence-based practices overseas and develop a practical guide for tutors to use in Australia.

ALA CEO, Jenny Macaffer, met with Amanda during the scoping phase of her research, suggesting key contacts overseas and valuable resources to explore.

Jenny believes it is important to provide easy access to ‘go to’ resources to strengthen the capacity of educators and volunteers working in this space. Jenny said that overcoming fear of learning can transform learning from an intimidating experience into a rewarding journey, as learning can unlock potential, inspire a sense of achievement and boost confidence.

After conducting 90 interviews across 25 adult and community education providers in New Zealand, Canada, New York, Ireland and Scotland, Amanda’s guide is now [available](#).

**“Educational fear is often the result of poor previous educational experiences, and it then has such a negative impact on how the person is able to learn”. Amanda Wilson**





Jenny Macaffer and Amanda Wilson in the North of Tasmania

"It is very much a practical guide, not an academic paper. It is based on what I observed and was told has worked overseas and includes recommendations and actions, practical examples, things a tutor might implement if meeting with a learner tomorrow."

Amanda says that the guide – which is intended for adult literacy and numeracy service providers, tutors, industry bodies and education policy makers – includes education methods that have helped learners reduce feelings of educational fear and explores "why it is important to address these feelings, what we can do, how we can do it, and how to tell if it's working".

The focus is on adult literacy practices where English is the first language. And knowing that adult learners study in a wide variety of settings, Amanda wanted to make sure she addressed how educational fear can be reduced across all settings.

Some of Amanda's key findings include the benefits of tutors being able to:

- View and approach learners holistically, considering their whole life context and supporting them to be ready to learn
- Reposition their role as a partner in learning rather than a traditional 'teacher' recognising that learners have valuable life experience and skills, and tutors can also model positive learning behaviours
- Recognise growth and learning can be uncomfortable and have conversations with learners to reframe these feelings as natural, safe, and usually a necessary response to trying something new.

Amanda said she found that there is greater recognition overseas of tutors as "accidental counsellors" and, as such, they are supported in developing skills, such as who may require broader support.

"The reality is that adult learners are always going to be thinking about other things and to be impacted by everything that is going on in their lives."

"Tutors don't need to be able to meet all needs, but it helps to be part of referral networks so that when a learner shows their trust by telling them something they are able to support the learner to get access to services."

You can [read more](#) about how insights provided by adult learners led Amanda to see the potential for a broader scope in the Commentaries section of the ALA website.

If you are an ALA member, you can also access the February ALA [webinar](#) which discussed Amanda's research.

**"The reality is adult learners are always going to be thinking about other things and to be impacted by everything that is going on in their lives". Amanda Wilson**



# Flagship journal in safe hands



**After seven years, Associate Professor Trace Ollis is stepping down as Editor of the Australian Journal of Adult Learning (AJAL), ALA's flagship research publication. Trace looks back over her time as Editor and her career in adult and community education.**

Since moving from TAFE teaching to academia, Trace Ollis has always ensured that adult learners' voices are at the forefront of her research and teaching. "Their stories and voices are way more important than anything that I can say," she told Quest.

Trace began her career in education, teaching community development and welfare studies within the TAFE system. During this time, she worked with people returning to study, refugees, women resuming study after having children, and single parents. She consistently saw the transformative power of adult learning in their lives.

After teaching for 12 years, Trace completed a Master's in Training and Development, followed by a PhD before joining Deakin University in 2012. Currently, Associate Professor in Education (Applied Learning), Trace has made a significant contribution to how adult learning of all kinds transforms individual lives and communities. She has published both nationally and internationally in this area. Her research is driven by social justice education, learner transformation, and issues related to lifelong learning, widening access and participation.

Trace was ALA Vice-President when she agreed to also take on the role as AJAL Editor in 2017. When celebrating its 60th anniversary in 2020, Trace reflected on the journal's significance:

"AJAL has always nurtured the work of young scholars, backed by an active Editorial Board of esteemed adult education scholars within Australian and internationally. The journal's publications have reflected the changing and evolving nature of adult education scholarship and history in the Australian and Asia Pacific context".

Now, as AJAL celebrates its 65th anniversary and as she finishes her term, Trace retains a strong belief in AJAL's continuing importance to the sector.

"It is a wonderful journal, and, after so many years, there are also amazing archives. I would strongly recommend anyone in the adult education sector take advantage of ALA membership so they can look at these. They are a record of social change and the history of adult learning in the community context in Australia and beyond".

Trace says the Journal has always used a "double-blind peer" review process, involving two expert academics in the field. This ensures a rigorous evaluation of any contribution to the journal.

A further strength of AJAL, Trace says, is the "practitioner articles" which are non-refereed but draw on contributions from teachers and tutors about current issues in adult learning in the field. "We give people in the field at the grass roots level the ability to publish about practices and programs happening in

**"ALA publishing AJAL ensures that the socio-cultural history of the journal is maintained, including its deep connections to the adult learning sector". Trace Ollis**



**L-R: Former AJAL editor, Roger Morris, Trace and Jenny Macaffer**

the community. This is a unique feature of AJAL". AJAL also remains one of the few academic journals, Trace says, that are published through a peak body rather than a large publishing group with multiple focus areas. "ALA publishing by AJAL ensures that the socio-cultural history of the journal is maintained, including its deep connections with the adult learning sector".

Committed to ensuring that her research is "immersed and engaged" with the work of the community adult education sector, Trace believes greater recognition is needed for the capacity of local education providers to meet the learning needs of their communities. She highlights their ability to respond to broader challenges, such as natural disasters like fires and floods and, particularly post-COVID, increasing financial insecurity.

"Adult community education providers are very responsive to everyday issues happening in society. They might be running formal education programs as well as groups promoting health and fitness etc. But, if they find out that the local community is having problems with something like food insecurity, for example, they will run programs to assist people".

"The people managing and coordinating these providers and the teachers and tutors are pretty remarkable at being able to respond to the needs of their communities".

Trace is also a strong advocate for greater recognition of how teachers in ACE place learners at the centre of their teaching, adapting pedagogy, lesson plans and support to meet their needs.

"There are so many learners who left school early, who have had a crisis interrupt their learning, who have never felt that they fitted into the formal system of schooling. Before they can learn, teachers have to

reframe previous negative experiences and provide a great deal of care and support. There is a lot of transformative and reparative work being done to assist learners to gain confidence".

Moving away from editing AJAL—though she will remain on the editorial board—Trace plans to focus on her research. She is set to publish a book in 2025 with ALA Vice President Annette Foley on lifelong learning and adult learning in a community context. Additionally, she will begin a new research project with Professor Vicky Duckworth in the UK, *Transforming Adult Learner Lives Australia* – watch this space.

**"Adult community education providers are very responsive to everyday issues happening in society". Trace Ollis**



**Trace and Henrick Steenberg, AJAL Editorial Team**



## New AJAL Co-Editors

ALA Board member and Lecturer in Deakin University's School of Education, Dr Piper Rodd, and Dr Cheryl Ryan, also from the Deakin School of

Education, have become Co-Editors of AJAL. We look forward to introducing you to them further in our next AJAL issue.



Dr Piper Rodd



Dr Cheryl Ryan





# Member round up

News from ALA member organisations around Australia



Recent Sea Swift graduates, Brodie Johnston and Mitch Hardy

A collaboration between **Charles Darwin University TAFE** in the Northern Territory and Sea Swift, a northern Australian business, is developing local skilled workers to ensure essential services to remote communities are maintained without relying on a fly in, fly out workforce.

Sea Swift and CDU TAFE are working together to combat a worldwide shortage of seafarers, training locals in maritime regulations and safety through a Certificate II in Marine Operations.

“Since the launch of the campaign we have had a lot more locals across Northern Australia employed, the training provided through CDU TAFE ensures all our staff are trained properly specifically in regulations and safety,” said Sea Swift’s Leanne Hulm.

[www.cdu.edu.au/study/tafe-aquaculture-maritime](http://www.cdu.edu.au/study/tafe-aquaculture-maritime)

Save the date for the 2025 **Linkwest** Conference from Wednesday 20 to Friday 22 August. To be held at the Joondalup Resort in Perth, the conference theme is ‘Playing to our Strengths’. [www.linkwest.asn.au/PlayingToOurStrengths](http://www.linkwest.asn.au/PlayingToOurStrengths)

**Tamworth Community College** in regional NSW is looking for new trainers and assessors and Board members. Trainers are needed for the College’s accredited and non-accredited courses and programs. [www.tamworth.nsw.edu.au/we-re-hiring-](http://www.tamworth.nsw.edu.au/we-re-hiring-)

Queensland’s **STEPS Group Australia** recently received positive media coverage when WIN News Wide Bay featured the launch of its new Skills for Education and Employment (SEE) program in Hervey Bay. It was great to see the STEPS team and program participants highlighted. If you are in the area and interested in applying for the Hervey Bay Program, visit [www.stepsgroup.com.au](http://www.stepsgroup.com.au) for details.

Harmony Week always provides our members with wonderful opportunities to celebrate diversity and inclusiveness.

**Doveton Neighbourhood Learning Centre** invited everyone to celebrate Harmony Week by asking everyone to bring in a favourite recipe and join in creating a vibrant community cookbook while meeting new people and celebrating different cultures.



**Libraries Tasmania** brought people together for extra special story time events, English classes and morning teas. Visitors were able to celebrate diversity, inclusiveness, respect and belonging in safe, welcoming spaces.

Lots of information was also provided about accessing more than 4,500 bi-lingual picture books in 70+ languages, eMagazines, eBooks and Audiobooks for all ages in a range of languages.





# Be part of ALA's 2025 Annual General Meeting (AGM)

It's that time of the year again! You are invited to attend our online AGM where we come together to celebrate, reflect, and welcome new faces to our Board while bidding farewell to those whose terms have ended.



She is the CEO of [Zahra Foundation Australia](#), an organisation dedicated to supporting women's recovery from domestic and family violence through access to education, financial counselling, and economic empowerment.

Kelly-ann's work is grounded in collaboration with the community sector and a deep belief in the transformative power of adult education. Under her leadership, Zahra Foundation delivers evidence-based programs like Pathways to Empowerment, a pioneering Adult Community Education initiative that helps women impacted by violence rebuild confidence, strengthen foundational skills, and pursue further education, employment, or entrepreneurship.

Join our 2025 AGM – special guest, **Kelly-ann Tansley**, CEO, Zahra Foundation, on the **power of adult education in recovery from family violence**.

Everyone is welcome to attend (only current ALA members entitled to vote).

## Details

1.00 pm to 2.00 pm AEST

Friday 16 May 2025

Via Zoom

**Email** [info@ala.asn.au](mailto:info@ala.asn.au) by COB 13 May to secure your spot.

## About Kelly-ann

With over 15 years of leadership in the for-purpose sector, Kelly-ann Tansley is a nationally recognised advocate for gender equity, social justice, and systemic reform.

# Are you an ALA member?

Becoming a member of Adult Learning Australia is a fantastic way to support lifelong and lifewide learning across Australia.

To find out more about all the benefits of an ALA membership, go to our website:

[www.ala.asn.au/join-now](http://www.ala.asn.au/join-now)

# ACE update

Adult and community providers keen to find out more about how generative AI can be used and taught can now access a new Australian resource. Australian tertiary education regulator, TEQSA, has created *Gen AI Strategies for Australian higher education: Emerging practice*.

This practical guide focuses on process (including risk management, monitoring and review), people (encompassing staff, students and external partners), and practice (learning, teaching and assessment). <https://www.teqsa.gov.au/guides-resources/higher-education-good-practice-hub/artificial-intelligence>

**Community Colleges Australia** has changed its name to Community Education Australia.



**Australian Training Awards** nominations are now open. As in previous years, nominations can be made through state and territory awards (11 categories) or directly in five categories, including excellence in Language, Literacy and Numeracy practice. Check state and territory award nomination details and closing dates. Direct entry nominations close 31 May. All details can be found at <https://www.australiantrainingawards.gov.au/awards>

Campaigning by the adult literacy and numeracy sector has led to creation of a separate occupational code specifically for adult literacy and numeracy teachers. The **Reading Writing Hotline** says a discrete occupational code will raise the sector's visibility and ensure that it can now be included in a broader range of policy and funding initiatives.

The new code is part of the Occupation Standard Classification for Australia (OSCA), released by the ABS in December. [www.readingwritinghotline.edu.au/a-win-for-the-adult-literacy-and-numeracy-sector/](http://www.readingwritinghotline.edu.au/a-win-for-the-adult-literacy-and-numeracy-sector/)

## ALA welcomes Natalie Corrigan

Meet our new Membership and Engagement Officer, Natalie Corrigan. Natalie comes to ALA after six years work with the NDIS and the alcohol and other drugs sector. Please contact Natalie if you have any member enquiries via [engagementofficer@ala.asn.au](mailto:engagementofficer@ala.asn.au)



# QUEST

Quest is the national magazine for adult and community education. It is published three times a year by Adult Learning Australia.

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