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Student and 2023 ALW Scholarship winner Hayley Drummond

Lessons in life

Hard work and dedication, fuelled by the support of inspiring teachers and the confidence boost of an Adult Learners Week Scholarship, has set this young Canberra student on a bright path.

Hayley Drummond's future is ready to take off.

The 23-year-old student will soon complete her studies at the Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT), paving the way for her to embark on her dream career in the disability sector.

"I'm so excited about my future and very grateful to everyone that played a part in that," she says. "I'm kind of over the moon about it."

But Hayley didn't always feel so hopeful.

Bullies made high school an ordeal, and when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Hayley left school before completing Year 10.

She spent much of the pandemic feeling isolated, suffering severe anxiety and panic attacks whenever she tried to leave her home.

Life began changing for the better for Hayley when, despite being terrified by the challenge, she decided to enrol in a Foundation Skills course at CIT.

There, she says, a group of exceptional teachers began rebuilding her confidence.

Notable among them was her first CIT teacher, Foundation Skills tutor Fran Handoko, who Hayley says was enormously generous with her time, help and reassurance.

"The majority of teachers I have had at CIT have been incredible people who have gone above and beyond for me — and I will carry their help with me for the rest of my life."

"Fran said that she saw potential in me — even when I didn't see it in myself," says Hayley.

"She also shared with me her stories of being an immigrant and rebuilding her life here, which I really appreciated. She inspired me with her story, and it made me realise that people are resilient even when we don't think we are — we have that inherent drive to survive and thrive.

She helped me understand that when I could barely understand how to use a computer."

A turning point came in 2023 when, nominated by Fran, Hayley won an Adult Learners Week Scholarship.

Hayley says the shock win changed her life.

"I never thought something like that could ever happen to me," she says.

"Winning the Scholarship came at a time when I
(Story continues on p. 3)

Message from the CEO



“Big ideas about creativity, learning, and imagining better futures are not just abstract, they play out in real lives and communities every day.”

At a time when we are witnessing the decay of cities and places across the world whether through conflict, displacement or environmental damage, it is a reminder of how fragile our social, economic and civic fabric can be. Cities and regions that once thrived can be diminished by war, neglect or division. Yet history also shows us that cities and communities can be rebuilt, renewed and reimagined.

It is in this context that I am reminded of the work of Charles Landry, an international authority on the role of imagination and creativity in urban change. I studied Landry’s work when working as a community development practitioner in local communities. Landry argues that places flourish when they unlock their capacity for inventive and creative thinking and open new conversations about their future.

In his landmark book *The Creative City: A Toolkit for Urban Innovators*, he urges us not to forget that if we are to secure future wellbeing, education and learning must be placed centre stage.

To this end, I’ve been thinking a lot about how imagination, creative conversation, and learning can play a central role in building a new world, one grounded in fairness, equity, and the wellbeing of people, communities and other sentient beings. Many of the systems we have in place today are deteriorating, outdated, or simply not fit for purpose, as shown by the way capitalist forces, big business, and the powerful can bend democracy to suit their own whims and favours. Clearly, these systems have had their day, and if we want a better future, we need to create new systems and structures that bring out the best in everyone, everywhere.

Adult and community education has a vital role to play here. It fosters critical and creative thinking, encourages collaboration, and equips people with new skills to come up with real solutions. While AI can be a useful tool, humans should not outsource their ideas or imagination to a chatbot because our capacity to think, imagine, and create together is what makes us human. By clearly recognising the limits of the old and the vast potential for human creativity, even as AI becomes part of our lives, we can use our knowledge, imagination, and collaboration to envision and build a more liveable, equitable world. The challenge is urgent, but with the right vision and the collective capacity to act, we can create something better for today and for generations to come.

These big ideas about creativity, learning, and imagining better futures are not just abstract, they play out in real lives and communities every day.

In this edition of *Quest*, we see some of these ideas in action: from Hayley’s journey as a 2023 Adult Learners Week Scholarship winner, to Matilda’s semester enrolled at Denmark’s International People’s College, to insights from outgoing ALA Board member Professor Annette Foley. We also celebrate ACAL’s 50 years of impact, look at global trends in adult learning, and hear ALA Vice President John Sheen’s perspective on the Menzies Oration 2026.

Together, these stories show how learning, creativity, and collaboration can spark positive change, connect communities, and shape a brighter and fairer future for us all.

Finally, I would like to pay tribute to Professor Annette Foley, who steps down from our Board in May. Thank you Annette for your outstanding contribution over many years to Adult Learning Australia, and for your ongoing advocacy and research.

We hope you all enjoy this edition of *Quest*.

Jenny Macaffer, CEO

(story continued from p. 1)

needed it the most — when I was struggling to break into adulthood and when I was at a point where I just needed something to tell me: you can do this.”

An invitation to visit Parliament House in Canberra to meet then federal Minister for Skills and Training Brendan O’Connor followed, with Hayley then enrolling at CIT in a Certificate III in Individual Support (Disability).

Since then, Hayley has had to take some time away from study to help her mother recuperate from surgery. But true to her optimistic outlook, Hayley sees the positive in that hurdle too.

“Caring for my mum has given me a lot of perspective and maturity. I’m grateful for that and hope I can use that experience in the rest of my study and in my work.”

With only two subjects left to complete, Hayley hopes to soon begin looking for work in a support role with people with disabilities, with her own experience with autism and support workers giving her unique insights as both practitioner and client.

“There are incredible people in this industry, but I have also seen how easy it is for people with disabilities to be marginalised,” she says.

“I can bring that sense of empathy and understanding to my work, and I know how the sector works in reality — I can see it from both sides, and I don’t think there enough people who can do that.”

Hayley is also keen to point out that studying as an adult has been full of valuable lessons, many of them unrelated to curriculum or assessment tasks.

“I don’t think the social aspect of learning is highlighted enough,” she says.

“When I’m interacting with my classmates, I picture it as interacting with future coworkers and thinking about how we can professionally and kindly talk to each other and have a shared goal.

I was lacking in a lot of social skills and development and that is something that seems to have sped up and developed quite well within the past two years. Study has given an opportunity to talk to other people, to people with disabilities, to a lot of international students who were in a similar anxiety boat to me.

I have learnt a lot more about culture, more about politics, a lot more about what is going on around me, about what other people are facing in their lives and the challenges they are dealing with too.”

Personal growth through learning has come in many forms: after always struggling with her computer skills, for example, Hayley is now confident enough to help others.

“My skills were atrocious when I started at CIT,” she laughs. “I used to get so frustrated with Microsoft Word and PowerPoint, it just made me feel helpless and sometimes stupid.

Fran took so much time teaching me about OneDrive and even how to deal with the passwords on my computer — there wasn’t anything too big or too small that she didn’t have the time or energy to help me with.”

As someone who has overcome many obstacles along the way in her return to study, Hayley now urges other



Hayley visited Parliament House to meet with then federal Minister for Skills and Training Brendan O’Connor after winning her 2023 ALW Scholarship

young adults to give learning another try.

“I know that it feels scary but honestly, ask for guidance from people that are older than you, be ready to listen and be ready to learn. All those things can help you so much and it’s so worth it when you get to the other side of that feeling of, can I do this or not?”

It will be something you can look back on for the rest of your life and think, I am so glad I took that jump.”

With further studies in nutrition on the horizon, Hayley says her time at CIT and the Scholarship have given her a self-belief and a future her teenage self would have thought impossible.

“I started to get my confidence up when I started studying at CIT,” she says.

“But it was really the lightbulb going off when I won the Scholarship and I realised that not only Fran thought I could do this but that multiple people thought I had potential. It was that which really set everything in motion.”

Adult Learners Week is run by ALA and will be held from 1–8 September. Updates on the 2026 scholarships and grants will be available soon at adultlearnersweek.org

Visit ALA’s [Learning Changes Lives Foundation](http://LearningChangesLivesFoundation.org) to find out more about available opportunities.



Hayley and her Foundation Skills teacher at CIT, Fran Handoko

2025 Capacity-building workshop for GRALE 6 survey for the Asia and the Pacific region

《成人学习与教育全球报告》(第六版) 暨亚太地区调查能力建设研讨会



SHANGHAI, CHINA 中国·上海
2025.10.15-10.16

UNESCO INSTITUTE FOR LIFELONG LEARNING / SHANGHAI NORMAL UNIVERSITY
RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR LIFELONG LEARNING AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, SHANGHAI
INTERNATIONAL BIG DATA ANALYTICS CENTER, MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SHANGHAI, P.R. CHINA
联合国教科文组织终身学习研究所 上海师范大学
终身学习研究所 教育部教育大数据与教育



Mapping a world of change

Adult Learning Australia (ALA) is proud to have been the only Australian civil society organisation chosen to contribute to a landmark report on the ability of adult learning and education to respond to rapid global change.

The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) has published five editions of its Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE) since 2009.

To be published next year, **GRALE 6** will use both qualitative and quantitative data in survey responses from more than 120 countries to explore four key themes:

- digitalisation and the state of adult learning and education
- adult learning and education and economic shifts
- combating climate change through adult education
- adult learning and education in conflict and post-conflict reconstruction.

Australia's response has been submitted by the federal Department of Education, with input from the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR), and with ALA as the only civic society organisation selected to contribute.

ALA's CEO Jenny Macaffer welcomed the opportunity to help inform this global research.

"The Director we worked with from the Department of Education noted that GRALE 6 had been a very worthwhile learning experience and expressed gratitude for our enthusiastic engagement," Jenny says.

"He also circulated some of our material to colleagues in other departments such as DEWR, noting that adult learners are often overlooked as a distinct and potentially disadvantaged demographic in higher education narratives, where it is sometimes assumed that all university students are recent Year 12 school leavers."

While the federal government had final oversight of Australia's response, ALA's response included reiterating the urgent need to recognise the national importance of lifelong learning.

This contribution builds on ALA's long history as a sector leader with UNESCO and the International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA) process.

ALA has supported and participated in CONFINTEA for many years, including being the sole civil society organisation supported by the Australian Government

to participate in CONFINTEA VII in 2022, attending online during the COVID-19 pandemic alongside representatives from more than 140 countries.

This participation contributed to the [Marrakech Framework for Action \(MFA\)](#), which included significant commitments to financing adult learning initiatives.

ALA's role in the current GRALE 6 survey builds on a regional workshop held in Shanghai, China last October, at which ALA was represented by former ALA President and adult learning specialist Dorothy Lucardie.

The workshop brought together representatives from 14 nations across the Asia and Pacific region to ensure GRALE 6 receives high quality data to help meet its objectives: analysing how sudden and significant shifts affect adult learning needs and opportunities; assessing adult learning systems' adaptability; identifying best practice and innovative approaches; and offering recommendations and guidelines to stakeholders and policy-makers.

"What was interesting in Shanghai was the way in which the GRALE 6 process is trying to move away from using terms like crisis to instead talking about giving people the skills they need to deal with rapid changes. And, of course, adult education is ideally placed to provide people with the skills and attitudes they will need," says Dorothy.

"This means moving away from a deficit model where people are trying to fix a crisis that has occurred, to giving people the skills and abilities they need to respond to changing circumstances."

Dorothy believes GRALE 6 offers a crucial opportunity to explore the impact of profound global change, and the multi-faceted benefits of adult learning in the face of those transformations, from a holistic perspective.

"We need to make sure that the human side, the whole-person side is represented."



A free and practical guide for adult literacy tutors



Adult literacy tutors across Australia now have a free, comprehensive reference text built around the science of how people learn.

Funded by the Tasmanian State Government through TasTAFE and Libraries Tasmania, the Adult Literacy and Numeracy Tutor Manual was developed by recognised specialists in the field and peer reviewed for rigour.

Designed for tutors anywhere in the country, including volunteers in Libraries Tasmania's Adult Literacy Service, it is a welcome addition to the resources available to the sector.

Created by adult learning specialist Korrily Loveday and Iona Johnson, Senior Literacy Advisor at Libraries Tasmania, the manual explores the science of learning to read and write, explaining high impact approaches when tutoring adult learners.

The Adult Literacy and Numeracy Tutor Manual presents an array of research-informed strategies for instruction in reading, writing and numeracy, along with templates for lesson activities, and links to free resources. Session planning ideas and an overview of the Australian context are also included.

The manual's three parts are designed to stand alone.

Part One includes information on adult literacy in the Australian context, defines the rationale that underpins the recommended approach and provides detailed chapters on reading, writing, numeracy and session planning.

Part Two takes an in-depth look at working with learners impacted by trauma, dyslexia or developmental language disorder. These are important areas of knowledge for any tutor working with adult learners.

Part Three offers a set of practical templates designed as a flexible starting point that tutors can shape around each learner's individual needs.

While primarily written for one-on-one tutoring, the manual also has much to offer group settings, though

it's not intended to replace the need for tutors to devise individually tailored learning plans and goals for each learner.

All three sections are available to be downloaded for free, a decision Korrily and Iona were firm on from the start. Both recognised a need in the sector for a single, reliable source of research-informed instructional strategies, learning theories and practical templates, presented in a way that is accessible and easy to use.

"We are always very keen to share whatever we learn with the sector, rather than everyone reinventing the wheel," says Iona. "That sharing creates a more efficient, more informed sector."

Korrily reports that feedback from tutors has been overwhelmingly positive.

"The response has definitely been one of appreciation. Tutors can pick it up, find what they need and apply it straight away," she says. "It feels genuinely rewarding to have it out in the world, and to hear that people are finding it such a useful resource. It is research-informed, practical, and free. That combination seems to be resonating."

You can download the three sections of the manual here: libraries.tas.gov.au/get-help/reading-writing-maths-help-for-tasmanians/literacy-resources/

Korrily and Iona welcome your feedback on the manual. You can email Korrily at kjloveday.consulting@gmail.com and Iona at iona.johnson@libraries.tas.gov.au.

The manual's contents and uses, with Korrily and Iona as speakers, was the focus of ALA's first webinar of 2026. ALA members can access our library of webinar recordings for free at: ala.asn.au/professional-development/recorded-sessions/.

Details of upcoming webinars can be found at: ala.asn.au/professional-development/webinars/

A legacy of critical thinking

Dr Annette Foley is a Professor of Adult and Vocational Education at Victoria's Federation University, with more than 30 years' experience as a researcher, educator and leader across the adult community education sector, and a particular interest in lifelong learning. Annette has contributed her expertise to ALA's Board since 2019 and became President on the eve of the COVID-19 pandemic, serving since then as Vice-President and currently as a general Board member. As she prepares to step away from the Board in May, Quest spoke to Annette about her impact and her insights.



How did you first connect with Adult Learning Australia?

My connection with ALA goes back at least 15 years and began with attending ALA conferences, reviewing articles for the Australian Journal of Adult Learning (AJAL) and taking part in ALA webinars. But it wasn't until 2019 that I first joined the Board, and a year later I became President. I will probably be known forever more as the COVID president, because I was the president all the way through the pandemic.

Were there lessons for adult community education from the COVID-19 pandemic?

I think it really reinforced the importance of place-based learning and connection. Adult education's forward-facing approach, through neighbourhood houses and community houses for instance, was an important way for people to connect. A lot of the learning centres continued to do that fundamental work of connecting with people during COVID — even just by ringing them to check in — so they felt less frightened, less lonely, less isolated. We saw the impacts of the pandemic on very

"I'll always advocate for ALA, because it's just so important to me."

vulnerable groups, and it was highly stressful for them in many ways, including a lack of digital literacy, a lack of technology, all those things that we knew were incredibly important during that period, because people were very isolated without it.

Looking back at your time on the ALA Board, what are you proudest of?

I think being able to draw on my academic background to advocate very strongly for adult learning. Being able to speak directly to government is really important. I had the chance to meet with Brendan O'Connor when he was federal Minister for Skills and Training, and that was very valuable. His message was: we know what you do but we need to see more data around the outcomes of ACE. Where's the evidence? What are the outcomes of ACE in terms of higher levels of literacy and numeracy? There was some data but not enough. And that has led to some of the research that Deakin University Associate Professor in Education (Applied Learning) Tracey Ollis and I are still leading.

What do you see as the chief challenges and opportunities ahead for the sector?

I think that one of the key things that adult community education can do is to educate and protect against misinformation. I think that has to be a key role going forward. And that includes digital literacy but also understanding the way in which social media and so on can infiltrate your life. We're seeing more and more people becoming isolated and becoming excluded because they don't have the technological advantage that others do.

Another really important challenge is to fly the banner for critical thinking, to teach people that things need to be looked at in a critical way. Government needs to know that learning isn't just ABC. Learning is about life and health and being able to be critical when pieces of information come to you. I think we must be committed to convincing government that one of ALA's roles is to work with community, to assist with developing programs that work to help people think critically. Otherwise, we really are in a lot of trouble in terms of people not

being literate enough or critical in their thinking to be able to navigate growing levels of misinformation and disinformation.

"My mantra is to keep pushing, keep pushing, keep telling government how important adult learning is, and back that up with statistics."

What's next for you now that you're moving off the Board?

Associate Professor Tracey Ollis and I have just edited a book on adult community education, and it's with the publishers. We both felt that it was timely to discuss the role of adult and community education both nationally and internationally. We've got authors from England, Canada and Australia, and we're hoping it will be launched later this year. We are also expanding our research on ACE, and we're getting data now from other states. So that data will go to government. I've also just been appointed as Director of the Centre for Regional Education Research and Development (CERED) at Federation University in the Institute for Education Arts and Community (IEAC). And I'm the convenor of the Researching Adult and Vocational Education (RAVE) research group at Federation University. So, it's big and it's busy. But I'll always advocate for ALA, because it's just so important to me.

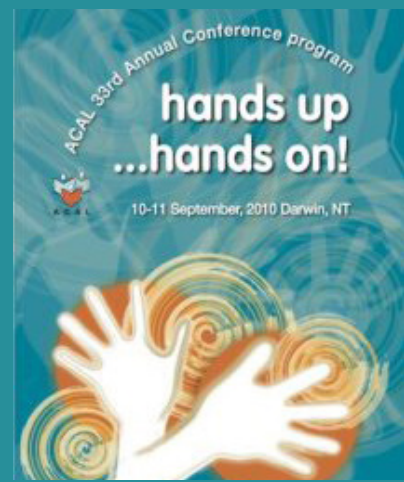
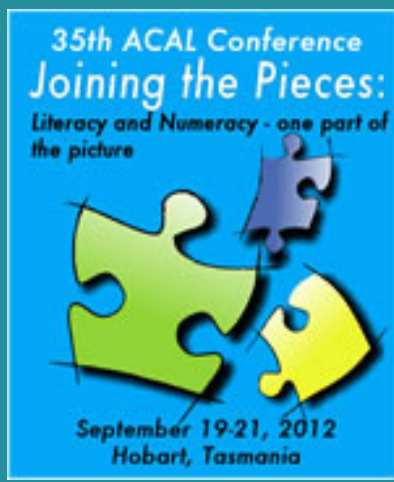
Can you leave us with a final thought on what ALA and our members should focus on?

My mantra is to keep pushing, keep pushing, keep telling government how important adult learning is, and back that up with statistics. Australia is really behind the times when it comes to lifelong learning policies, and we need to continue to advocate very strongly around the importance of the Australian government recognising a lifelong learning agenda. Because we know at ALA, and through empirical research across the country, that lifelong learning assists people to be healthier — mentally, physically and socially.

You can read more about Annette's research here:

federation.edu.au/institutes-and-schools/ieac/staff-profiles/staf-profiles/Annette-Foley

federation.edu.au/institutes-and-schools/ieac/research/rave-researching-adult-and-vocational-education



Powered by people and passion

It's a milestone year for the Australian Council for Adult Literacy (ACAL), with the independent national body celebrating an impressive half a century of impact and influence.

ACAL was established in October 1976 by a working group set up at an Australian Association of Adult Education (which later became known as Adult Learning Australia in 1998) conference in Adelaide earlier that year.

With adult literacy pioneer Arch Nelson AM (1911-1998) at its helm, ACAL's founders believed that an independent single-focus organisation was needed to champion the emerging adult literacy movement and lobby governments and policymakers for substantive action.

Fifty years later, ACAL is still a national force for adult literacy, extensively involved in advocacy and professional development, sharing practical advice and expert insights through its training sessions and annual national conference, and run by a committed network of volunteers.

Among them is Anne Kiley, who joined as a member when she was starting out as an adult literacy educator in 1979 and is now ACAL's Vice President. Like many of her peers, Anne has seen profound shifts in Australia's

"I will end then with one thought about the future. It is that the success of a national movement for adult literacy will depend on the extent to which it is, in effect, also a local movement for literacy communication and community."

Arch Nelson AM, ACAL inaugural Chair, 1984 National Conference

adult literacy landscape over those decades — though she believes many of the fundamental issues and the need for policy action remain unchanged.

"People I speak to are still shocked by the statistics around adult literacy in Australia," Anne says. "It remains a hidden problem because those affected are often productive members of society and very talented at finding ways of meeting their needs, despite their literacy challenges."

"But society keeps evolving and changing, and people keep being marooned or pigeonholed. It's not necessarily a functional literacy issue for everyone; for some, it's not having the literacy skills to retrain or being able to use technology."

Anne, now an adjunct academic in vocational education and training in the school of education at Charles Sturt University, says ACAL's longevity owes much to the vision and energy of its members and leadership.

"It's always been a grassroots organisation and those involved really believe in the cause — which is alerting people to the ongoing issue of adult literacy in a rich, highly developed country like ours, which has a good education system and compulsory free education."

Jo Medlin, who has been ACAL's President for the past decade, agrees that the Council's core strength is its people.

"Networking is a real value of ACAL membership. If someone is in a remote area of the country and they want to know about something, for example, they can contact us and we are usually able to put them in touch with someone who can help them," says Jo. "It's not necessarily that we hold all the expertise, but we can connect people within our network."

Find details of anniversary events and archival material celebrating ACAL's milestone at www.acal.edu.au.

Learning beyond borders



Stepping into learning as an adult can lead you on many new paths and for some, like Melbourne student Matilda Steenberg, even to a new country.

This July 18-year-old Matilda will leave Melbourne's inner-west for the small town of Elsinore in Denmark for five months living and studying at the **International People's College (IPC)**, one of the European nation's 70 folk high schools.

First established in the 19th century, Denmark's folk high schools offer a unique style of learning: no exams, grades or entry scores, and no set curriculum. Instead, they focus on immersing their students in community building, civic education, and enjoying the exploration of new interests and skills through learning.

Matilda chose IPC as Denmark's only international folk high school, with its 40 subjects taught in English, though she says she's aiming to become fluent in Danish — the native tongue of her father Henrik, who is ALA's Project Officer — during her stay.

The school's story goes back to 1921, when it opened as a **peace school** in the aftermath of World War One with a vision of creating an inclusive and diverse community of global citizens and learners. In 1949, it hosted the first UNESCO International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA).

Today adult learners of all ages from more than 30 countries can stay for between four to six months, studying an eclectic menu of subjects which range from

human rights studies to photography, choir to existential philosophy.

Matilda is enrolled to study international relations and law next year when she returns to Melbourne and hopes her time at IPC will help her develop a global mindset and introduce her to different ways of learning.

"The classes they offer are very interesting and I like the fact that there's not the pressure of Year 12 where you're just memorising stuff because you have exams," she says. "I think it's really cool to be able to just go there and actually like what you're studying rather than thinking about being able to ace a test."

"I'm also hoping to meet lots of other people from different countries around the world with their own cultures and experiences, and to learn more about what I'm planning to study at university in Australia — but from a European perspective."

"A place where strangers gather to learn without fear, waking the quiet corners of themselves through shared living, open minds, and the gentle, daily practice of democracy."

Nelima Lassen, IPC Principal

Quest will be catching up with Matilda when she returns home.

2026 Annual General Meeting

You are invited to ALA's 2026 Annual General Meeting.

Date: Friday, May 22

Time: 1pm — 2pm AEST

Where: Online via Zoom

Everyone is welcome to attend, although please note that only ALA members are eligible to vote.

Register your attendance at ala.asn.au/2026-ala-agm/

We're delighted to confirm that our Guest Speaker at this event will be **NDIS Commissioner Louise Glanville**.

Speaking on the topic of **Contributing to a Sustainable NDIS through Learning**, Louise will discuss the role of learning in strengthening the capability and capacity of the NDIS workforce. She will also explore how learning supports people with disability to participate fully in community, work and everyday life, building skills such as communication, literacy and confidence.

We also have three Board vacancies.

Nominations are now open at: ala.asn.au/are-you-interested-in-joining-the-ala-board/

Nominations will close at 5pm on Friday, 1 May.



Louise Glanville has been NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commissioner since October 2024. She is an experienced Chair, CEO, Deputy Secretary and Commissioner across legal, social and government sectors, and is a member of the BreastScreen Victoria Board.

Louise is the former CEO of Victoria Legal Aid, and Deputy CEO of the National Disability Insurance Agency. She has also held chair roles for National Legal Aid, the Victorian State Government's Metropolitan Development Advisory Panel and the Victorian Assisted Reproductive Treatment Authority.

**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 a ALA membership, go to our website:

www.ala.asn.au/join-now

Member Roundup



The *Keep Our Doors Open* campaign went to Victoria's Parliament House. credit: Neighbourhood Houses Victoria.

Neighbourhood Houses Victoria's *Keep Our Doors Open* campaign hit the streets of **Melbourne** in February, calling on the Victorian Government to urgently increase annual funding for the state's vital Neighbourhood Houses.

Neighbourhood Houses Victoria CEO Keir Paterson says staff and programs are being cut at many neighbourhood houses as they grapple with a perfect storm of rising costs, soaring community demand and lower government funding.

"Neighbourhood houses are under unprecedented pressure," says Keir. "Years of underfunding has pushed almost half into deficit, leaving them at risk of closure."

Read more about *Keep Our Doors Open* at nhvic.org.au.

Nominations for the **2026 Australian Training Awards** are open until May 26, showcasing excellence in vocational education and training (VET) across the nation, with winners from each state and territory. Visit australiantrainingawards.gov.au to nominate an individual, business or RTO across five categories, including the *Excellence in Language, Literacy and Numeracy Practice Award*.

In the **Australian Capital Territory**, the Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT) has announced the appointment of a new Board Chair and Deputy Chair. Mr Thomas Rogers will join **CIT** as Chair with more 30 years of experience in education, training, governance and national administration, including a decade as Australia's Electoral Commissioner (2014-2024). New Deputy Chair will be Professor Kylie Walker, who brings deep expertise across science, technology and innovation, including key roles in major national initiatives such as the Australian Space Agency.

Victoria's Learn Local Awards are back for 2026, with nominations open in eight general award categories including:

- The Ro Allen Award – Learn Local Pre-accredited Learner (Skills for study and life)
- Learn Local Pre-accredited Learner (Skills for work) Award
- Learn Local Pre-accredited Trainer Award

- Learn Local Leadership Award
- Small Learn Local Provider of the Year
- Large Learn Local Provider of the Year
- Learn Local Innovation Award
- Learn Local Partnership Award

Winners for the awards, which are now in their 20th year, will be announced at a gala ceremony on October 8. Nominate now at vic.gov.au/learn-local-awards.

The **South Australian Government's** Skills SA held an online ACE Information Session to share insights into ACE and workforce development in South Australia, including the provision of micro-credentials and implementation of the National Skills Agreement in SA. ALA CEO Jenny Macaffer presented at the session.



ACE Update

The Menzies Oration 2026 was given by Australian Human Rights Commission President Hugh de Kretser on February 18 at Federation University on Wadawurrung Country in Ballarat, Victoria. ALA CEO Jenny Macaffer and ALA Vice President John Sheen attended to hear President de Kretser speak on "Social Cohesion and the Future of Australia: Leadership, Civility and the Greater Good", and Quest asked John for his thoughts on the Oration.

"Hugh de Kretser's Menzies Oration was a timely reminder that social cohesion is not an abstract ideal; it is something built every day through participation, opportunity and trust within our communities. His reflections on the importance of civility, citizen leadership and a potential Australian Human Rights Act highlighted how democratic societies rely on people having both a voice and the confidence to use it.

For those of us involved in adult and community education (ACE), the themes of the Oration resonate strongly. Across Australia, ACE providers work at the local level to create spaces where people can connect, build skills and participate more fully in community life. Adult learning programs often bring together people from diverse backgrounds — new migrants, people re-entering education, mature aged learners and jobseekers — helping them develop not only foundation skills, but also the confidence and agency to engage in civic and economic life.

An important point raised by ALA during the discussion following the Oration was the relationship between social cohesion and economic participation. Access to education, training and lifelong learning is fundamental to this connection. When people are supported to build skills, access employment and participate in their communities, they are also contributing to stronger, more cohesive societies.

This is where the work of Adult Learning Australia and the broader ACE sector matters. By championing lifelong learning and inclusive education pathways, we are helping to build the conditions for a more connected, resilient and equitable Australia."

ALA has consistently called for the creation of a federal Human Rights Act. Our submission ahead of the 2026 Federal Budget emphasises the urgency of this reform: ala.asn.au/submissions



HRC President Hugh de Kretser (L)
& ALA Vice President John Sheen

Our congratulations to the **City of Wollongong**, south of Sydney, for becoming a member of UNESCO's **Global Network of Learning Cities**. As part of a worldwide network of 91 countries, Australia now has five Learning Cities: Wyndham City Council and Melton City Council (Victoria), Canning City Council (Western Australia), and Circular Head Council (Tasmania) in addition to Wollongong. Each Learning City shares five priority learning areas: Education for Sustainable Development; Health and Wellbeing; Upskilling and Reskilling; Digital Skills; and Global Citizenship and Peace Education.

QUEST

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