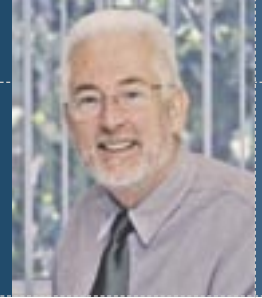


Editorial



Throughout 2005 I have received many enquiries about the positive impact of learning on an individual's physical and mental wellbeing. This Summer Edition's theme will focus on learning and mental health. The stories from Adult Learners' Week 2005 and the 45th Annual Conference (which were to run in this Edition), will now be placed in the Autumn Edition of QUEST, 2006).

Readers will recall we invited John Cross our former Research Manager to contribute an article on *Learning for Wellness* in the winter edition of QUEST. John's article drew attention to the positive association between learning and wellness. His article generated interest from many readers including those who were not ALA members, but readers of QUEST in libraries and elsewhere, and also from several of the overseas visitors ALA received this year, particularly Dr Peter Lavender from NIACE. Peter featured in our last edition of QUEST and has kindly written an article for this edition on mental health.

Why focus on learning and mental health? There are two primary reasons for ALA focusing on this important issue, at this time. Firstly, mental illness is a growing phenomenon in our society, reportedly moving towards 20% of the population being affected. We believe that learning can be an effective *circuit breaker* to the onset of mental illness, but that it can only do this if practitioners see the evidence and start implementing learning opportunities in their communities. Adult and Community learning providers are amongst the best placed to do this.

Secondly, experts advise us that Christmas can be one of the most stressful times for many of us, because it is full of high expectations. Most age cohorts can experience anxiety triggers ranging from financial concerns and family relationship difficulties through to social isolation. A lack of social networks in this context can lead to increased depression and thoughts of suicide. Adequate professional support is usually not available over this period with hospitals usually running with only a skeleton staff.

We are fortunate to have Senator Dr Ursula Stephens, Convenor of the Australian Parliamentary Friends of Schizophrenia, contributing an introduction to the issue of mental health. Senator Stephen's article paves the way for a series of what I believe to be optimistic stories from a range of experts in this field.

I say optimistic, because in this issue there are a number of DIY web applications developed by the Centre for Mental Health Research at the Australian National University, that have been thoroughly researched which can be of benefit to sufferers of all ages.

We know the biggest determinant of health and mortality is social class* but it is clear from this series of articles that mental health may transcend, to some extent, the class factor. As always there is much more research and lobbying to be done in this field but hopefully with this edition we are contributing our small but positive steps to the long march forward.

Our *In Quest of Learning* contributor is the energised Donna Bridge, Churchill Fellowship Winner and Principal of the East Kalgoorlie Primary School. Donna's story is inspirational and reflects not only her own success, but also the learning journey her Aboriginal brothers and sisters have made in Western Australia. Those of you who have seen the video produced by Steve Kinnane and Lauren Marsh, called the *Coolabroo Club*, established in the early days in East Perth, which created a core of strong indigenous mentors, will understand how long and difficult the journey has been.

Many, I think, will agree with me about the importance of the ABC as a source of informal learning in their daily lives. In this edition we have a short article about how ABC Asia Pacific is providing formal learning opportunities for those wishing to learn English throughout the Asia Pacific region.

Online Study Circles in Tasmania is an interesting story about the application of a highly successful, but underutilised adult learning methodology. So it is encouraging to see the methodology being trialled by Tasmanian Communities Online.

On the theme of Learning Circles, ALA has just released its own accredited Learning Circles Facilitator Kit through Australian Training Products (ATP). This training program maps to competencies in four units in TAA04 Training and Assessment Package and two units from TAA50104 the Diploma of Training and Assessment Package. Further information is available from Mary Anastassiou, Public Affairs Manager at ATP on 03 9655 0631 email: mary.anastassiou@atpl.net.au or visit www.atpl.net.au.

Read, learn and enjoy. Have a safe and happy holiday season.

*James, Kathryn (2001) Prescribing Learning. NIACE, Leicester