

# QUEST

ISSUE 4 2015

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ABC Open has been a lifechanger for Norm Clarke.

## Opening doors to rural life

In small village halls, bush libraries and regional towns across Australia, ABC Open producers teach locals how to hone and share digital stories to share with a huge online community.

Before he went to his first workshop five years ago, Wyndham farmer Norm Clarke's only experience with computers was 'pulling the plug out of the wall and telling the kids it was time to go to bed'.

Back then Norm knew next to nothing about digital technology, but his family had bought him a digital point-and-shoot camera for Christmas and he was hooked. 'It took me 10 minutes to work out it was smarter than I am.'

'I was listening to the radio and I heard the ABC was running a workshop where you write a story behind a photograph

'Each project is a learning experience. When it's finished I look at it and notice what I could have done better but then I move on to the next one.'

and I was keen to go along. What's the point of having all your photos stored away on a hard drive? You want to be able to share them with others.'

Now there's no stopping him. Norm's stories and films – over 40 so far – are full of keen observations of life on the land and have connected him with an enthusiastic audience.

'It's been a lifechanger for me. I've grown in confidence and I'm thinking of new stories all the time', Norm says.

ABC Open was launched in 2010 to encourage people in regional Australia to connect and share stories. Since then over 15,000 people have contributed over 86,000 stories to the online platform. Contributors use photos, writing, video and audio to describe people, places and personalities to reveal a vivid picture of regional life.

For many contributors the process begins with a workshop in a local hall or library run by an ABC Open producer. Norm worked mainly with producer Vanessa Milton. 'Vanessa is a natural when it comes to teaching – all of the producers I've worked with are. After she's explained something, Vanessa will look at each of us around the table to see if it's sunk

(Story continues on p. 3)

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*Lifelong and  
lifewide learning  
for all Australians*

# Message from the CEO



National debates about adult learning suffer from a narrow focus on learning as training or retraining for work and ignore the role of lifelong learning in social justice. Having access to lifelong learning opportunities empowers people to fully participate in the social, cultural, political and economic life of our communities.

Welcome to the December edition of *Quest*.

Here we are entering the festive season, the time of year when we reflect on what we've achieved and when we plan for the year ahead.

This year there's been much reporting and commentary in the media about the consequences of opening the vocational education and training system to VET Fee Help. Earlier this year Adult Learning Australia made a submission to the inquiry into the operation, regulation and funding of private vocational education and training providers in Australia. In our submission we raised the issue and gave examples of the unethical marketing practices of brokers representing training organisations who targeted the disadvantaged and vulnerable, pressuring them to enrol in courses they were unlikely or unable to complete and leaving them in significant debt.

Recently legislative changes were introduced into parliament to deal with the practices of rogue training providers. Only time will tell if the proposed changes are enough to support a system in which education is increasingly defined in terms of economic benefit.

The loans scandal has cast a shadow over the vocational training system but there are still great examples of people engaged in non-formal and formal learning and benefiting from the experience that we should celebrate. This edition of *Quest* again highlights people enriching their lives as well as those of the communities they live in through adult learning.

I recently spent a week with 34 representatives from 16 countries in the Asia Pacific undertaking a leadership development course sponsored by Asia South Pacific Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE). At this event I met people from across our region and from communities facing difficult and uncertain political and economic circumstances. I found their resolve and determination to remain focussed and to champion

access to learning that improves quality of life for individuals, the local community and society inspiring.

Adult Learning Australia's mission is to advocate for sustainable, accessible and equitable adult and community education organisations. These organisations promote lifelong learning and help people develop the skills and knowledge they need to participate fully as citizens in a vibrant democracy; to live in harmony in a diverse and rapidly changing society; to manage personal health and well-being and to engage in meaningful work. Providing people with lifelong and lifewide learning opportunities also promotes social inclusion and social justice.

I look forward to continuing that journey with you in 2016. On behalf of Adult Learning Australia I wish you a Merry Christmas and a safe and happy New Year.



Stories conjure a vivid picture of life in regional and rural Australia.

(story continued from p. 1)

in. If it hasn't she explains it in simpler terms until we get it. She's really great at reading and then responding to people.'

But teaching and learning doesn't end with the workshops. 'When I'm back home and working on a story, when I feel like it's finished or when I'm sick of it I put it up on Vimeo and send the link to Vanessa who gives me feedback so I can modify it. The back up you've got is amazing. I have a go and if I get in strife I know help is only a phone call or an email away. I've got this top notch support.'

Norm spends most of his days alone with his dogs on the farm and visits town just once a week. 'Doing these workshops and projects has got me out, forced me to mix with people. For example I've met one guy who's a dairy cocky and a bird photography enthusiast. I knew him before but I had no idea we had similar interests. Now we share links to one another's stuff on the web.'

There is no shortage of stories on the farm. 'There is so much to see. You can't help noticing things. Stories pop up all the time.' Norm says recording his observations has made him more observant. 'Last year we had a particularly wet year and for the first time in 30 years I noticed we had native orchids. Have I been blind and not seen them or is it really just a one off event? I took a photo of them and then I noticed there were patches all over the bloody place.'

Apart from his own stories, Norm has produced a video for a local Landcare group on caring for country in the Towamba Valley and he is a contributor to the *Atlas of life*, recording his sightings of plants birds and animals.

Norm's short film *The loo with a view*, first published on the ABC Open website, has been screened at a local film festival as well as on ABC-TV.

'It's made me much more aware of exactly what is there, what plants, insects, animals we are sharing our patch with. Now when I see a snake I want to know what sort of snake is it, I want to know the names of the plants I see.'

Norm worries about friends and neighbours who are frightened and intimidated by computers. 'I know people who are fearful of having a go because they are anxious about breaking something, of not knowing what to do, and the terminology is very offputting. My friend at the computer shop in town talks to people on the phone when they've got computer problems and he asks them what the icons on the desktop are doing and they don't know what he's talking about.'

'I understand why people are frightened of computers but I also know what's on the other side of that. Years ago at Agricultural College I started collecting specimens of plants. I put them in a pile of newspapers with a brick on top but the earwigs got to them and I had to throw them out. Now I can take umpteen photos and record them that way. In the past, you'd have to look in books to identify them but now the Web helps you do it in an instant.'

Norm's advice is 'Have a go. Make contact with your local ABC Open producer. Knock on their door, email or phone. It's free and all you've got to do is get off your butt and go along'.

Norm's currently working on a story for ABC Open about the weekly chore of emptying the grease trap, his mischievous dog Bindi and a Frisbee. Norm laughs, 'I think you can probably guess the ending'.

'People stop me in the street and tell me they like something I had up on ABC Open.' But Norm doesn't do it for the praise. 'I do it for the fun and the challenge. If I'm happy with it that's all that matters.'



ABC Open producer Vanessa Milton is a natural when it comes to teaching.

**ABC Open producer Vanessa Milton's** patch takes up an area in New South Wales stretching from the Victorian border to Batemans Bay and across to the Snowy Mountains.

On any given day she can be running a writing workshop, teaching an amateur historian how to record interviews or helping a farmer make a film about life on the land.

Since 2010 when Vanessa started with ABC Open she's run hundreds of workshops as part of the project to share stories of life in rural and regional Australia.

'There's so many benefits for rural Australians in telling their stories. The major media outlets are in the cities and a lot of Australians don't understand what it's like to live in the bush. People in rural and regional areas have different lives so here's a chance for people to tell a story about it and have an impact on an audience.'

It's common for people to come along to the workshops with a great story to tell but worried that they don't have the skills.

'It's our role to show them what's possible. We make the process as approachable as possible so that people feel they can do it if they have the time and the interest – whether it's audio, video, photography or writing.'

In workshops Vanessa says anticipating and fixing potential technical hitches ahead of time helps things run smoothly. 'Knowing what gear people have so they can work independently is important. It's amazing the tools that most people have on their phones.' Then it's a matter of finding out what participants already know and what they expect so she can tailor the session to their needs and interests.

But while creating a story is one thing, publishing it is another.

'It's very new for a lot of people to think about publishing. A lot of them don't think their story is particularly interesting to other people. One man I worked with was a retired carpenter who wanted to write something for himself, friends and family about his passion project, which was building a boat. But I said there'd be so much interest in this beyond your own circle. I worked with him to include more historical context for a national audience, and turn his journal of the project into a two part story called *Building my dream boat*.'

'It's great to have a platform for publishing and it's always exciting to see them up online.'

What impact does it have on people who publish their stories on ABC Open? 'It's empowering, there's no other word for it. Whether it's knowing your story is valued, that you've learned new skills, or just the idea of being connected to other people in your own community, that's a fantastic feeling for people who contribute.'

Stories published on the ABC Open website give readers powerful insights into life in the bush and give contributors confidence that what they find interesting about their own small patch of the world is of interest to others. Sharing stories about life in regional Australia knits people together and strengthens their connection to place.

Some stories travel from ABC Open to other ABC websites, TV and radio bringing stories of regional and rural Australians to metropolitan media.

**The ABC Open website is a great resource for adult learners with stories about people, places, memories and experiences of life in rural and regional Australia.**



Vicki Mennie learnt how to show rather than tell.

ABC Open's online community is thriving with fellow contributors supporting, challenging and learning from each other.

'The great thing about an online community is that you might never meet in person but people write a lot about their lives so they really get to know each other. The community continues contributing to monthly projects and themes and giving one another feedback so it continues to grow and build. It's fantastic.'

**Vicki Mennie** lives near Moruya a small rural community on the far south coast of NSW, where the large local population of kangaroos almost equals the number of residents.

A former hairdressing teacher, Vicki jumped at the chance when she saw the ad for ABC Open's 500 words writing workshop at a library in a nearby town. 'I thought 500 words? That's a good way to get started.'

ABC Open producer Vanessa Milton asked Vicki and the seven others who'd expressed interest to bring along some writing on the theme of 'a scary moment'.

'In the workshop Vanessa really broke the writing process down and explained how to keep an audience interested. I learned you have to think about how to keep the story moving, that it's important not to rabbit on, to underwrite instead of overwrite and to show rather than tell.

Vanessa encouraged Vicki to submit the story to the ABC

Being part of a community, sharing stories that matter to her and challenging herself to create and learn are the things that keep Vicki motivated and involved.

Open website. All submissions to ABC Open are moderated for errors and to make sure all legal obligations are met before a story goes live.

The resulting story, 'Drop the pack and run' was published on the ABC Open website soon afterwards.

'A month or so later Vanessa called to ask if she could record and produce my story for a storytelling event as part of The Candelo Village Festival. I was stunned. I had no idea it was that interesting. It gave me confidence and courage to write and put myself out there and pursue writing.'

Three years, five more workshops and twenty published stories later, Vicki says she continues to learn a lot about writing as well as about herself.

'In real life people tell me I'm funny, that I'm a natural born comedian. But writing stories brings out the other side of me. On paper I am more serious, reflective. It's made me realise I probably use humour to survive life's ups and downs. Writing is definitely cathartic. And if one of my stories can help anyone else deal with the similar issues and make them feel they are not alone, then it's worth it.'

Having an audience and a purpose keeps Vicki motivated and learning. Each month ABC Open promotes a theme to inspire contributions. Vicki says writing 500 words on a topic is good discipline.

Her advice to anyone in regional Australia who hasn't gone to an ABC Open workshop 'Get there as soon as you can. Don't be afraid. ABC Open staff are there to support and help. What have you got to lose? Absolutely nothing.'

Photo credit:  
[Gundagai](#) by [freeaussiestock](#), CC-BY-2.0

# Learning from the NDIS rollout

Trials of the new National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) have been underway since July 2013. Participants in the trials say planning ahead is key for everyone involved – including community organisations.

Are you NDIS ready?



The NDIS aims to enable people with disabilities to participate in ordinary life.

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is the biggest social reform in Australia since the introduction of Medicare.

The goal of the NDIS is to enable people with a disability to take part in everyday life and to make sure they have the support they need to be part of the social and economic life of the community they live in.

## Different levels of support

The NDIS provides support at different levels or 'tiers'.

**Tier 1** – Builds community awareness about the issues faced by people with disability and promotes inclusion and opportunities for people. For example, the NDIS co-ordinator works with a local bowls club to improve disability awareness amongst members and officials so that a young woman with Downs Syndrome can learn to play and become a member.

**Tier 2** – Provides general information for people with a

disability who are not eligible for a package, their families and carers about the most effective care and support options within community support groups and services. For example, the NDIS refers a man with arthritis who is worried about how it is affecting his job to a disability employment service and an arthritis support group.

**Tier 3** – Provides eligible people with specific support for services and facilities in the community, according to an agreed plan and funded support package. Each person's plan and support package will be unique because each person's needs, preferences and aspirations are different.

## Getting ready

1. Understand the changes involved. The NDIS is a completely new way of supporting people with significant and permanent disability. Understanding what the Scheme involves and how it works will help your organisation identify ways of better meeting the needs of people with disability in your community.
2. Expect more enquiries. The NDIS involves helping people to build their social and economic participation. Adult and community education (ACE) providers can expect more contact with people with disabilities, their families and carers interested in returning to learning or undertaking training.
3. Review organisational skills. Many ACE providers are experienced in working with a diverse range of students with a wide variety of abilities. However, staff and volunteers may require training to respond effectively to the individual needs of learners.

In order to access the NDIS, a person has to meet the following requirements:

- have a permanent disability that significantly affects their ability to take part in everyday activities
- be aged less than 65 when they first access the scheme
- be an Australian citizen, live in Australia and hold a permanent visa or hold a Protected Special Category Visa.



Many more people with a disability will enter the workforce.

4. Plan for increased collaboration. People with a disability who are keen to return to learning may need a variety of services to help them with their learning and support needs. The NDIS will work closely with community organisations to identify opportunities for people with disability.
5. Expect demand for disability related courses. It is estimated that the growth in the demand for disability support and services will create more than 50,000 jobs.
6. Follow how the trials of the Scheme are progressing. The NDIS started in July 2013. For the first three years it was trialled at selected locations around Australia. Roll out of the full scheme in New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory will start progressively from July 2016. See how the Scheme is working for people with disability, their families, carers and providers at the NDIS website [www.ndis.gov.au](http://www.ndis.gov.au).

## Fast facts

By September 2015 19,758 people with disability had an approved NDIS plan, at a total cost of \$1,201.1 million. The cost of the average package (excluding residents of large institutions) is \$34,831. This is below the expected full Scheme average of \$38,600. Participants carers and families report high levels of satisfaction with the Scheme.

ALA members can access a webinar recording of Judy Buckingham from the ACE DisAbility Network: [‘How will the NDIS affect my organisation?’](#)

Thanks to Yooralla College Barwon for background information for this article.

# 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:

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



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# Practising lifelong and lifewide learning

On bikes, in boardrooms, in bands and in books some of our Board members share how they practice lifelong and lifewide learning.



## Cath Dunn

### Shares the learning journey

When I retired two years ago I plunged excitedly back into activities that I hadn't done for decades – ballet and French classes. I also decided after countless years of classical singing lessons that I should brace myself and practise singing solo more often. So I organised some friendly soirees with choir colleagues.

This past year I was voted in as President of ALA and was faced with the need to understand so much more about the operations of the organisation and the people behind it.

With all these new activities, I am always learning. But the interesting thing is not so much what I've learnt about these activities, it's what I learn about myself. The things I used to be able to do that aren't easy any more; the fun to be had in learning and trying, and maybe failing, together; and how the enjoyment mostly comes down to having supportive people to share the journey.



## Malcolm Lobban

### Discovers surprising connections

2015 has been another busy year for me as an adult learner. At work I have completed a ten session How Language Works course which was fascinating with excellent resources, inspirational readings and activities. The collegiality between teachers from different schools was also an important part of the learning process. The program is designed for teachers of English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD) and while it was about how people acquire the English language, and how the English language achieves various functions I learnt a lot about writing and making my own written work more effective and focussed as a result.

I also spent the year working away for the sixth year on a professional doctorate, and what a slow process this is when you are working as well. The chapters are slowly evolving, but there is still some way to go. Completing the How Language Works course has definitely helped with this process, which surprised me, as the two things were not really related at all but I have learned how to be more effective as an author and that's helped me a lot.

The third area where I progressed as an adult learner was with my singing lessons – not only did this stretch my memory, trying to remember the lyrics of up to five songs at once, but also the music, harmonies and melodies as well. Who would have thought these skills in vocal technique and posture would relate to my work as a teacher, but once again they all related and helped me professionally as well. Not only does singing make you feel good you can do it in a group or alone and you can see yourself get better with practise.

Finally my work with our band – we now have been together for nine years – has combined all of the skills I have learned during the past year. A new bass player joined the group – a great singer who has stretched our skills and convinced us to add extra harmonies. Not only is he a new friend, but he also makes us sound better. We are not just a bunch of old guys who enjoy popular music from the era of Elvis and the Beatles, we are a rocking group of adult learners!



## Chris McCall Learns creatively

I practice lifelong and lifewide learning in a multitude of ways. I learn from my adult children. Their commitment to the environment includes not only spending time writing, volunteering, and advocating but they put their commitment to the environment into practice in their daily life.

I learn from the people around me – my colleagues, students, friends and people who I meet in my daily life. This can mean not only learning better ways of doing things, but also how not to do things.

Lastly I learn from my addiction – reading. I need a constant supply of books, to escape from the world and to delve into other people's lives and see how they survive and thrive.



## Paul Mulrone Finds reading an education

Have you ever picked up a book to read before going to sleep and found you couldn't put it down? My sleeping patterns have been thrown into chaos since I started reading Shantaram by Gregory David Roberts. This magical book is teaching me so much about India and the culture and customs of its people.

If I had to attend classes on the subject I would not learn nearly as much as I have from reading this book.

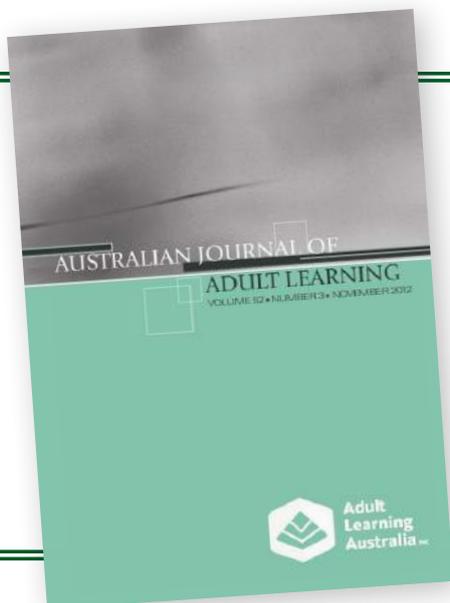
Every new book I choose is a learning journey. But I always have to catch up on my sleep when I finish a book. In 2016, I am simply going to have to make more time for reading.



## Barry Golding Learns from the seasons

Each year in a temperate climate summer gives me only one shot at a vegetable garden and one opportunity for an adventurous one week of interstate cycling. In the first case, I learn more about the seasons and new ways of growing things to eat.

In the second case I discover more about new and often beautiful parts of this diverse country in ways that are impossible in a car. For me learning is very much through doing, and undertaken not for a credential but for deeper understandings of self, friends, family, people, communities and the world.



## AUSTRALIAN JOURNAL OF ADULT LEARNING

Have you or your organisation got some research to share? The Australian Journal of Adult Learning (AJAL) is a leading journal that publishes articles to advance debate about theory, history and new practices in adult learning. AJAL has been published for over fifty years and covers a wide range of topics of interest to those interested in adult education. AJAL publishes both refereed and non-refereed articles and our editor welcomes contributions.

# Tips for a creative workplace

We know that students learn best when they're enjoying themselves. The same goes for staff. People do their best work when they enjoy their jobs, trust the people they work with, and are proud of the work they do.



Here are some tips for injecting fun and creativity into your workplace.

### 1. Create opportunities for staff chat

Google famously found that some of their organisation's best ideas began in the long queue at the canteen when staff standing in line began chatting with one another while they waited.

### 2. Vary the format of staff meetings

Use video, presentations, Google Hangouts, exercises, quizzes and voting to add energy and fun to the format.

### 3. Use incentives

Make boring or difficult tasks more engaging. For example, hold your budget meeting in the garden over lunch.

### 4. Encourage walking

Getting out and about can get the creative juices flowing, bring new perspective to a problem and breathe life into an idea that seems stale.

### 5. Schedule social events

Relaxing together away from work is a great way for staff to get to know one another and build trust and shared experiences.

### 6. Capture ideas

Display suggestions for improving the way things are done. Use the office whiteboard or a closed group on social media to brainstorm ideas and give feedback.

### 7. Celebrate successes and achievements

Celebrating goals reached, superior work or major milestones are great ways to recognise progress and motivate people to keep up the great work.

### 8. Spread the word

Share websites you enjoy and technical tips and tricks to make your work easier and more interesting.

### 9. Have meetings standing up

It's better for your health and brings a different focus to the discussion. Standing up keeps the meeting moving.

### 10. Schedule group learning sessions

Whether it's taking better photos with your iPhone or learning simple meditation techniques. Doing it together highlights the diversity of skills in your group and presents a great opportunity to learn from one another.

### 11. Review the office seating plan

Is there enough natural light and is the space comfortable and inviting? Make sure it's easy for staff to mix and share during the working day as well as allocating space for small groups and individuals who need uninterrupted time.

### 12. Invite a guest to your next meeting

Choose a colleague from another organisation with an experience you think is worth sharing. Or choose someone from a different field entirely whose ideas you think will inspire people to think differently about an issue.

Photo credit:

[Trapeze 101](#) by [David Galindo](#), CC-BY-2.0

## Put pets to work

Research shows that having pets at work makes staff happier and more productive and:

- lowers stress
- boosts job satisfaction
- improves physical health and wellbeing
- creates a more relaxed environment.



Barry Golding at Tongala launch.

The Men's Shed Movement

# Back to the future

A new Men's Shed opens every day somewhere in the world, according to Professor Barry Golding, author and editor of a new book about the international movement, which began in Australia.

The world's first Men's Shed opened in Tongala in country Victoria in 1998 and was the setting for the recent launch of *The Men's Shed Movement: The Company of Men*.

Over 200 guests including 'shedders' from around Victoria gathered at Tongala on November 16 to mingle and celebrate the first official history of a global movement.

Today there are 1500 Sheds around the world from Australia and New Zealand to Ireland, the UK and most recently, Denmark.

Professor Golding, Adjunct Professor at Federation University and ALA Board member has spent over a decade engaged in research on the informal learning offered by Men's Sheds and its effect on men's health and wellbeing.

'It's so fitting to return to the spot where it all officially began', Professor Golding said. 'And it's so appropriate to have the Hon Dr Sharman Stone, Member for Murray, who launched the first Shed 17 years ago to launch the book.'

In launching the book Sharman Stone said the movement owed much to the insight and energy of the Tongala shed founder, the late Dick McGowan, a former Vice Principal of the local primary school.

'Dick had a personal philosophy that people with good ideas and those with resources can achieve anything. He thought men needed three things after retirement; somewhere to go, something to do and someone to talk to.'

*The Men's Shed Movement* documents the history and development of Men's Sheds around the world and includes 90 case studies that capture the full variety of activities and approaches each organisation has adopted to provide company, meaning and purpose to men in their communities.



L to R: Sara Tee, Ruth McGowan and Hon Dr Sharman Stone.

## Mens Sheds worldwide

Of the 1436 Mens Shed around the world 500 or 30% are outside Australia.

- Australia 933
- Ireland 273
- England, Scotland and Wales 148
- New Zealand 57
- Denmark and Sweden 10
- Canada 5

Denmark's first Men's Shed or Maens Modesteder, which means 'Men's Meeting Place' in English, opened in Stevns in September 2015. It's the first of ten Sheds based on the Australian model being established in Denmark and Sweden.

# QUEST

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*Lifelong and  
lifewide learning  
for all Australians*



L to R: Chris McCall Manager YCC, Tina Soumbassis Chairperson YCC, Hon Marsha Thompson, Cameron McDonald Mayor of the City of Maribyrnong, Perry Wandj Wurundjeri Elder.

## Yarraville Community Centre turns 40

Hundreds of former and current students, staff and community members flowed into Yarraville Community Centre on November 19 for a celebration of the Centre's 40th birthday. The Centre in Melbourne's inner west was established when Community Centres and Neighbourhood Houses were springing up all over Victoria. It was part of a grass roots movement in the early 70s to reduce the isolation of women in the community.

A local primary school building was converted into a Centre to offer an informal, non threatening place for learning and social connection. Today the Centre provides education, training and support to more than 2,000 people each week and is one of over 1,000 neighbourhood and community houses throughout Australia.

Celebrations included a 'Welcome to Country' Smoking Ceremony, a launch by Hon Marsha Thompson, MP and Cameron McDonald, Mayor of the City of Maribyrnong, live music, community stalls, free workshops, a photographic and historic exhibition, a coffee cart and of course, cake.

