

# QUEST

ISSUE 2 2016

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## Champions for lifelong learning

**Community Learning Champions in inner Melbourne's culturally and ethnically diverse neighbourhoods support and encourage friends, neighbours and peers to take up quality learning and employment opportunities.**

The idea for a peer support program to encourage lifelong learning came about because of unscrupulous marketing practices by private Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) and resulting community disenchantment, Tara Willersdorf, Community Programs & Marketing Coordinator at North Melbourne Language and Learning (NMLL) says.

'A lot of RTOs were popping up and local people were being signed up for courses that they didn't have the English language and literacy skills for, so many were left with a piece of paper but no job prospects. That led to a lot of disappointment in the community.'

'Someone they know and trust who speaks their first language is going to be a lot more influential.'

'We wanted to provide the community with information on how to choose a reputable RTO and how to identify pathways so they could make informed choices about their education.'

'But most people in our community speak English as an Additional Language so traditional media and ways of communicating like flyers or posters don't work.'

Inspired by UK peer education models, NMLL selected and trained 10 Community Learning Champions in December 2013 who were given ongoing support and mentoring during an 8-month pilot.

'The work Champions do with communities includes providing information about good quality courses to working one-on-one with people to help them identify their interests, priorities and long-term barriers to learning or work.'

'They are often talking to people with negative experiences of learning or who regard themselves as too old, or who say "learning's not for me".'

Tara says that in selecting Champions, NMLL looked for

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 <https://www.ala.asn.au>

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*Lifelong and  
lifewide learning  
for all Australians*

# Message from the CEO



Our preliminary research findings suggest that in any one year more than 200,000 people access a local community based learning centre to learn a new skill, to meet like-minded people, build community and to improve their health and general wellbeing.

One of the eight policies areas that we advocate for is Learning for Civic Participation. This policy speaks about Australian communities being open and socially inclusive with unrestricted access to adult learning opportunities.

Recent research undertaken on behalf of Adult Learning Australia indicates the provision of adult and community education is delivered across Australia by as many as 2500 providers, community owned 'not for profit' organisations who provide formal and non-formal learning

Of the 2500 providers approximately 500 offer vocational education and training (VET) courses. VET plays an important role in the service offerings of 'not for profit' ACE providers. So it is imperative that current problems facing vocational education and training and the abuse of VET Fee-Help by private providers do not cast a shadow over the ACE sector. What is so unique and valuable about ACE is that any person seeking to re-engage with learning can attend a quality course at low cost and be in an environment that is learner centred. For this to continue ACE must be supported at the highest level of government.

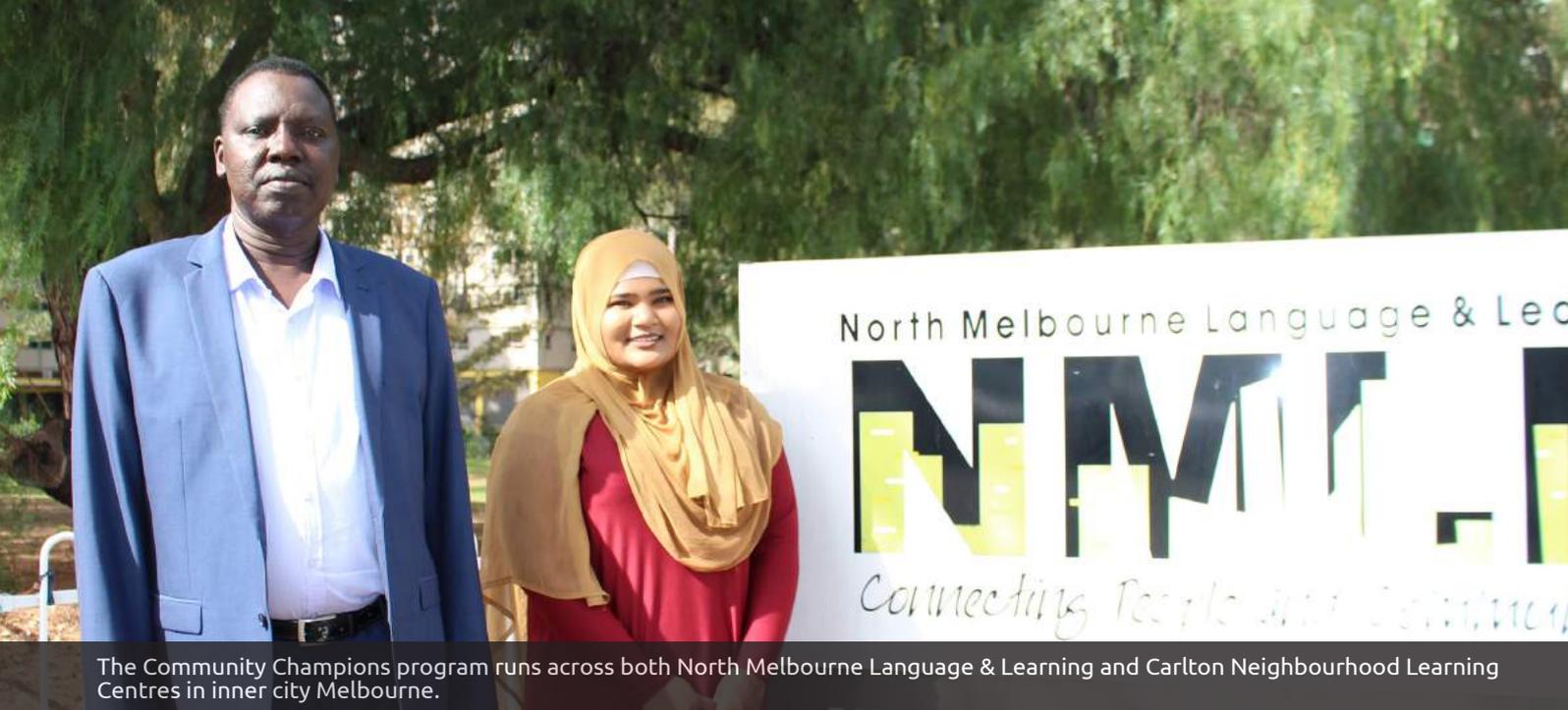
However, non-formal and formal learning offered by the ACE sector continues to occupy the margins of Australian government policy where learning is most often equated with earning. But as a substantial body of research both in Australia and overseas shows, learning is important not just for the workplace, but for personal development, civic and social participation.

Australian author Donald Horne dubbed Australia the *Lucky Country* in 1964 in describing how our prosperity was due to chance rather than planning. Horne argued that we were lucky because Australia's wealth and power continued to develop despite the lack of forward thinking in government and the general lack of political and economic innovation and enterprise. He might have been talking about 1964 but Horne's criticisms are just as relevant today and especially relevant when it comes to a lack of government foresight about adult and community education.

This edition of *Quest* will be published and distributed in the lead up to the federal election on July 2. We will be contacting and meeting with the major parties seeking a response to our policy platforms and advocating strongly for the formal recognition of adult and community education.

We are committed to advocating for accessible and equitable learning opportunities that far from being left to chance or political whim are planned and funded. The role played by ACE providers must be formalised and recognised through policies that are central to an inclusive vibrant democracy where Australians from all walks and stages of life have the opportunity to engage in lifelong and lifewide learning that helps to connect and engage them in the community, in education and in work.

Stephen Dunn  
Chief Executive Officer



The Community Champions program runs across both North Melbourne Language & Learning and Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centres in inner city Melbourne.

(story continued from p. 1)

people with an interest in and love of learning.

'In the interview we ask "Why do you think learning is important?". People often say learning equals freedom. They say, "You are free to go and do your shopping, visit your child's school, it benefits the whole family and the community".'

People who make ideal Champions are good communicators. 'We are looking for people who are willing to go out and talk up the program – they need the ability to talk to people of different ages and people in their social circle. It's a huge benefit being able to speak the same language.'

During the pilot, NMLL ran an event to support the Champions' work. 'We ran a Community Learning Festival to demonstrate how learning doesn't just happen in a classroom. A festival was a great way to offer non-threatening opportunities for informal learning and to influence how we interacted with prospective learners.'

The Festival included activities for kids, music, healthy cooking demonstrations, soccer clinic, legal information and adult learning taster sessions.

'A range of community organisations from legal services to libraries, the Metropolitan Fire Brigade and the YMCA ran activities at the festival to show a whole range of informal learning opportunities that people can access in their neighbourhood and beyond.'

Tara says the pilot was very successful not just for the community but also for the people who had volunteered to be Champions.

**'It's incredibly rewarding – sometimes when I'm running a training session I look out at a room full of Community Learning Champions and I feel like I should be in the audience. They have such a wealth of experience to offer.'**

'Our Champions developed confidence, learned new skills, improved their standing in the community and looked at their own pathways to further education. Two of our Champions have been admitted to the prestigious Leadership Victoria African Leadership Development Program.'

The successful pilot saw the CLC program funded from Helen McPherson Smith Trust for a further three years and extended to run both at NMLL and Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centres. Last year, the Centres recruited and trained 17 Community Learning Champions who spoke 11 different languages and engaged over 175 community members.

That program is really making a difference, Tara says, particularly when it comes to choosing a reputable RTO.

Champions use the 'Choosing an RTO checklist' to help people who are thinking about enrolling in a course to identify what's important to them, to ask the right questions, to visit the RTO and to make their own decision.

'One of our Champions was talking to a woman interested in working in aged care who had a young child. She wanted somewhere local, where training hours were child-friendly and where she could get English as an Additional Language support.'

'Together the woman and the Champion went along to an information session and now she's enrolled and studying aged care at the Brotherhood of St. Laurence.'

**ELMA KHAN** was selected and trained as a Community Learning Champion in February 2016. It was a trip back to Bangladesh with her mother that ignited Elma's love of learning.

'In Bangladesh I saw young children on the street working, which really shocked me. I found it amazing to see children who really had to struggle if they wanted to go to school. I volunteered to teach English at a local orphanage where the children didn't speak any English.'



Tara Willersdorf (L) with Elma Khan and Duot Yong (R).

'It was while I was working there that I discovered learning doesn't have to be teaching with a whiteboard, or structured, you learn in all sorts of different ways. As a teacher you learn from your students. For example, the children I taught knew so much about farming and agricultural life. I decided when I got back that I would do my Masters in Teaching and learn as much as I can.'

'I decided to volunteer as a Community Learning Champion because I wanted to share my love of learning with my community. Being a Champion I am learning and growing as a person.'

'In my community, I use different ways of promoting and connecting people up with information and learning opportunities. I use word of mouth, Facebook, all sorts of methods to invite people I know to come along to events that I think they will be interested in.'

'For people my age I let people know about lectures or talks related to things like mental health. For older people, I let them know about opportunities to learn more about what they're interested in which is usually healthcare, nutrition and dealing with physical problems.'

'One of my mum's friends asked her to ask me to find out about swimming lessons. She's just had a knee operation so she had mobility problems. As a Muslim woman, she needed women's only lessons so I found her classes at Collingwood Leisure Centre and she's loving it.'

'I want to encourage members of my community to use services such as English classes, writing a resume or legal aid. The more knowledgeable they are the more able they will be to make good decisions that will help them overcome challenges they face in settling in Australia.'

Duot Yong

**DUOT YONG** volunteered to be a Community Learning Champion because he wanted to improve awareness in the South Sudanese community about the range of services and training to help people find good jobs.

'Since I started in February I've connected two ladies up to one-to-one English classes. I've also referred people to our local council employment support officer who helps people apply for work. A woman I know had a problem with the law and I was able to refer her to the Community Legal Centre in Dandenong so now she is more confident with getting help. She's also interested in being involved as a Community Learning Champion.'

'Before I became a CLC I didn't know the difference between informal and formal learning but now I understand how important informal learning is throughout life.'

Duot's formal qualifications include a Bachelor and Masters Degree in Business and Project Management.

'I noticed a big difference between studying in Africa and studying in Australia. At university in Africa when you're given an essay topic you use your books and what you've been taught to write the essay. A big change for me studying in an Australian university was the amount of informal learning involved. When you get an essay topic you are expected to go away and do your own research.'

'Learning doesn't just happen in a classroom. Whenever you encounter a new situation, experience a challenge or have an interaction with someone new you are learning. And it's your approach and attitude that determines how much you learn.'

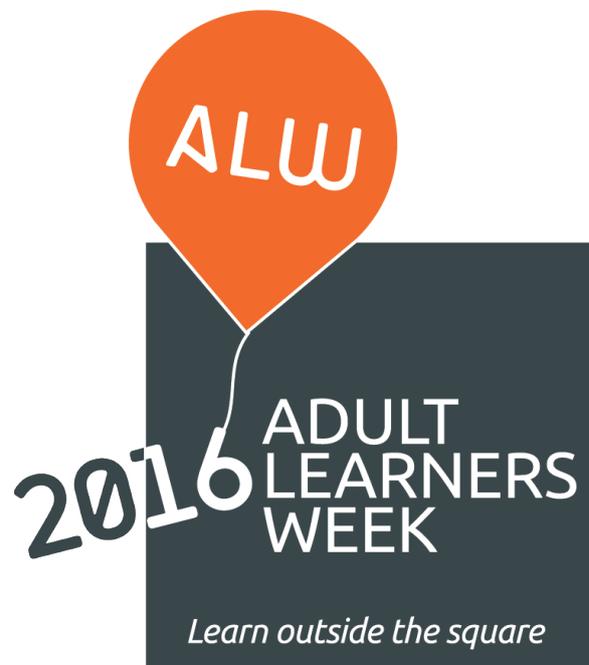
'But many people think only about formal education when they think about learning. I realised how much attention we pay to formal learning and the benefits of it but informal learning takes up an equally big part of our lives and is just as important.'

[www.nmll.org.au/nmll-community-learning-champions-project/](http://www.nmll.org.au/nmll-community-learning-champions-project/)

# Adult Learners' Week

In #ALW2016, we are exploring the different ways people can learn outside the square.

Adult Learners' Week runs from September 1-8.



## What is Adult Learners' Week?

Adult Learners' Week is an international festival of adult learning that has been celebrated in Australia since 1995. It is an opportunity to celebrate and promote all forms of adult learning, community capacity building and engaging people who have disengaged from learning.

Adult Learners' Week is about conveying positive messages about the range and value of adult learning to individuals within the community, to government departments, to policymakers, to the private sector and to the broader public via the media.

The Week is underpinned by hundreds of community-level events that are designed to promote the benefits of learning and showcase specific opportunities for participation that are available within local communities.

At its core, Adult Learners' Week is a celebration of lifelong and lifewide learning.

## Celebrating the benefits of learning

Adult Learners' Week is about celebrating the benefits of learning in all its facets. It is also about promoting that idea that learning helps us reach our full potential. And that it has the power to transform us.

As humans, we are adapted to learn and have the opportunity to continue learning throughout our lives. Engaging in lifelong learning can:

- result in a rich and full life
- help us make new friends and establish valuable relationships
- keep us involved as active contributors to society
- help us find meaning in our lives

- help us adapt to change
- make the world a better place
- increase our wisdom
- help us understand ourselves better
- help us develop our natural abilities.

## How to get involved

We are celebrating 21 years of Adult Learners' Week in Australia, and the breadth of supporting organisations has really grown over time. Today Adult Learners' Week includes events and activities from a variety of different organisations; including:

- adult and community education providers
- libraries
- men's sheds
- corrective services
- Broadband for Seniors kiosks
- local government authorities.

This year there will be 10 grants of \$250.00 available to event organisers who register their events early on the Adult Learners' Week events calendar. These grants are to assist with the cost of holding events during Adult Learners' Week.

We are also offering three \$1,000 cash prizes for the best ALW event, and there will be prizes for learners who share how they learn outside the square.

We will be in touch soon with all the details but keep an eye on the website, Like our Adult Learners Week Facebook page and follow the hashtag #ALW2016 on Twitter.

[www.adultlearnersweek.org](http://www.adultlearnersweek.org)

# Healthy cooking class serves up fun

Food rescue charity OzHarvest is running an education program for people on low incomes to learn about cooking healthy food on a budget.



OzHarvest's NEST program promotes healthy eating and nutrition and encourages ways to minimise the impact of waste on the environment.

At Adelaide's Hackham West Community Centre a group of 15 people peel carrots, chop onions and boil water for pasta. The air is filled with the smell of frying garlic and onions. There's laughter and chatter as people pass bowls and knives back and forth. This weekly class aims to teach locals how to choose and cook healthier food on a budget.

The Nutrition Education Sustenance Training (NEST) program is a free course run by OzHarvest, a charity which collects and redistributes surplus food and who provide the ingredients for classes.

It's week one of a six week program and most of the people in the group have never met before. 'Every group is different, which is always a challenge' says Amanda Kelly, OzHarvest NEST host and course leader, 'but we always have so much fun.'

Each session covers a different theme, which Amanda adapts to suit the needs of the group she's working with. Topics include balancing your diet; eating food for long-lasting energy; the truth about fats, oils and sugars; budgeting; healthy eating for young children and parents as well as reading food labels, planning, storing and strategies to reduce waste.

The nutrition education is low key and combined with hands-on practice. 'We have a chat and a cook. Everyone in the group cooks in every session. It's very informal and relaxed. Then we sit down and eat what we've cooked together.'

In the group's first session, 'Balancing it out' Amanda describes the five food groups and together the group talks about ways of making favourite meals healthier.

OzHarvest established the Nutrition Education Sustenance Training (NEST) in 2014. NEST is offered wherever there is an OzHarvest location in Sydney, Newcastle, Perth, Adelaide, Gold Coast, Brisbane, Canberra, Melbourne. Across Australia there are 15 trained NEST hosts like Amanda and 150 NEST volunteers.

'For example, if we've got a group of older people we will adapt their favourite recipes and give them a healthy twist. For example, we might make spaghetti bolognese adding any left over veggies into the sauce. Or for dessert we might make a bread and butter pudding using brown bread and a lot less sugar.'

Amanda says the more diverse people's food experiences and cooking skills are in the group the better because people learn from one another. 'We have men who have lost their wives who are first time cooks, mums who want to learn how to cook for a child with an allergy, and people from different cultures with different experiences of food and cooking who want a more healthy diet.'

Group members are a great resource for one another. 'We encourage people to tell us their memories and stories about food and cooking. At Hackham, an older Polish woman told us about what she ate growing up in Poland. It makes the class very social.'

Amanda uses practical exercises that help people understand complex nutritional information in a way that makes sense but also helps them make decisions that are better for their health. 'To demonstrate the amount of sugar in different drinks people in the group measure out the amount of sugar in a glass of Coke, a glass of sweetened orange juice and a cup of cordial.' This kind of activity taps into different learning styles, Amanda says.

'Then we put it into practise by cooking a meal that incorporates what they've just talked about.' In the healthy fats session, the group use avocados to make guacamole, and the session on sugar has them whizzing fresh fruit smoothies and baking muffins.

The final session, called 'Fridge raid' is a test of the group's ingenuity. 'I tell them to bring along something that's in the back of their cupboards. We pool it all on the table and combining it with OzHarvest food, we come up with ideas for what we can make. We aim for five dishes.

'It's all about how to cook healthy and delicious meals on a budget. These are people on low incomes so learning about meal planning and avoiding waste is important. We



NEST participants in Hackham West in their improvised kitchen.

encourage people to shop for food that's in season because it's cheaper, better quality and more nutritious.'

Amanda says she sees changes in people over the course of the program.

'It's surprising how many people don't have confidence to cook so it's really rewarding to give them tools to do that. It's great to think you've improved the way people eat and that you might have had an impact on their health.'

Amanda says cooking brings people out of their shells. 'Everyone gets a chance to work with different people each week. One person was very shy, didn't talk much and wasn't particularly confident socially. But by the end she was so much more relaxed. Sitting down and eating together at the end of every session makes it a very social experience for people.'

**CATHIE VINCENT**, Community Development Officer based at Hackham West Community Centre says 'There are always people in the local community keen to learn basic cooking and budgeting skills. And the NEST program was a great way to attract new users to the centre. For most of the group it was their first time attending the centre and most hadn't met before.'

'It ticked all the boxes from our point of view. The course was really tailored for our group, the resources were fantastic, and it was free.'

Cathie originally trained as a nutritionist herself and her first job in Adelaide was teaching homeless people basic cooking, shopping and budgeting skills so she knows the challenges involved. Cathie says some nutrition training can have a finger-wagging feel about it that's offputting.

Hackham West is the most disadvantaged area in City of Onkaparinga, which is located on the southern fringe of Adelaide. The Centre distributes OzHarvest donated food to people in the community who are struggling on low incomes and OzHarvest provides most of the food for the Centre's free children's service.

But OzHarvest's down to earth approach created a great atmosphere for learning.

'I love the way they aren't judgemental about what people buy and eat. They don't say "Buy organic" they say "Look at what's in your cupboard and let's work with that". If people have products in their cupboard that are high in salt they say, "Let's look at ways of getting around that".'

Luckily for Cathie and Hackham West Community Centre OzHarvest are flexible in their approach. When Tim James, Manager of OzHarvest SA came out to discuss running NEST Cathie told him there was one problem. The centre had no kitchen available. The OzHarvest team took it in their stride.

'They ran it in a transportable building with a couple of electric frying pans, a hotplate and a microwave and ran it beautifully. It was chaotic and it was noisy and people had lots of fun.'

The OzHarvest team are good at making do with what they've got. And it's a philosophy they are passing on to participants in this six-week course.

Cathie says the impact of the course has been terrific. 'People who did the NEST course tell us they use what they learned regularly at home. Things that perhaps other people take for granted, for them were really new. For example, they say when they are out shopping they look at labels differently. They look at the ingredients on the labels and they look at the price per kilo label to help them compare prices and get a better deal. It's changed people's lives. They are more aware and they can take more control, which is always a good place for people to be.'

Once inside the centre, participants also became more aware of other programs on offer. 'We had people say "I never knew you did parenting programs here, or yoga". We've had people come back and use the centre who hadn't used it before.'

What's the future for NEST at Hackham West? 'We'd run it again in a heartbeat,' Cathie says. The centre is hoping to include NEST in next term's Smart Living program. 'It's such a valuable resource, we're always thinking about ways we can get them back.'

[www.ozharvest.org/what-we-do/nest-nutrition-education/](http://www.ozharvest.org/what-we-do/nest-nutrition-education/)

# Rediscovering the joy of two wheels

Bike rider training for adults is flourishing in the municipality of Leichhardt in Sydney's inner west. The Rusty Rider course for those aged 25 and over turns those who are wobbly on two wheels into confident cyclists.



Rusty riders take to the streets.

**A group of eight people stand in a straggly line with their bicycles on a tennis court, listening to their instructor. Some of them fidget and others try not to look nervous. It's one thing to have ridden a bike as a kid, quite another to get back on one thirty, forty or even fifty years later.**

But within half an hour their nervousness has evaporated and the group are on their bikes smiling and having fun. It seems the cliché is true. Once you've learned to ride a bike you never forget it. 'It's remarkable how much people 'remember' once they start cycling again. The muscle memory is there it just needs to be tapped into,' says Rob Berry, course leader at Bikewise who runs the training for the municipality of Leichhardt.

Rob says he never tires of seeing that moment when everything clicks. 'One minute they are wobbly and worried and the next you see this big smile on their faces and they look natural on the bike.'

Rob says the course's slow pace and the chance to have a laugh quickly puts people at ease. 'People learn when they are having fun and when they are having a good time. People who haven't ridden a bike in a long time are likely to be a bit unsteady and lacking in confidence. They are worried about controlling their bike so it's important to keep the learning environment relaxed.'

**'The biggest challenge for new and rusty riders is developing a sense of balance. Once you've got it you feel confident, you never think about it again.'**

'We do all our classes off street so there's no pressure and we take quiet paths. We use a lot of games in the class. We'll have slow races where the winner is the person who can cycle the slowest. We play dodgems without crashes to get them used to negotiating limited spaces.'

'At the same time we encourage people go at their own pace. Each person has to demonstrate particular skills and be confident before they progress to the next stage. We teach people how to control their bike—how to stop, start, and use gears effectively. But we take it one step at a time. People only ever do what they feel comfortable with. That way we build people's confidence.'

The curriculum Bikewise uses is highly structured but flexible. 'We adapt it to people's skill level. Our groups have a good staff-student ratio so we can pace it to the needs of each person.'

'As people's confidence increases we incorporate more real life drills into our teaching. For example, we learn how to negotiate space with pedestrians and ride skilfully at slower speeds so people develop better balance and control.'

'We take realistic journeys where we say OK we're going to ride from one side of the park to the other, past the kiosk. At the end, people take away the skills to practise.'

Lots of people start off riding for recreation but Rob says that's a gateway to other kinds of riding. People start to think "I could ride to the shop to get some milk, or to visit a friend". It really opens people eyes to how much fun, what good exercise and how practical riding a bike is.'

Rob's taught hundreds of classes and over a thousand rusty riders aged from 25 to 75 in Sydney over the past 7 years.



Rob Berry from Bikewise. Photo: City of Sydney.

Overcoming worry and fear is key to learning to be an effective bike rider Rob says. 'There's too much emphasis on danger and not enough on empowerment, skills and confidence.'

Rob says the profile of the average bike rider is changing. 'More and more people are cycling and they are an increasingly diverse group, not just 20–40 year old male sporty types. Bike riding ticks so many boxes for people. We get people across all age groups interested in bike riding. It's often the quickest way to get places and it keeps you fit and active. It's a big culture change. There are more women riding and older people. It's no longer the domain of the young sporty man.'

Rob teaches 'Cycling in the City' and he always proud to see Rusty Rider people in this more advanced class. 'They've gone from concerned and worried and within a few weeks they are confident enough to get on the road.'

**KEN WELSH** Strategic Transport Planner at Leichardt Municipal Council says Rusty Riders began in 2014 along with several other rider training courses as part of a Council plan to improve the environment by reducing people's car use and to encourage active transport.

The idea for classes came from the Council's 'Share the path' campaign, which aimed to educate pedestrians and cyclists about safe and responsible riding and walking on shared paths.

'We set up a coffee cart on shared paths and we talked to people walking and cycling by. Older pedestrians said they used to ride when they were kids but don't want to make fools of themselves. They were interested in riding but didn't because they were worried about safety or hadn't

ridden in a long time and had lost confidence.'

The Council organised a range of bike rider training courses aimed at improving residents' bike riding skills and confidence and dubbed them 'Rusty Rider' classes, with one specially designed for seniors.

'The classes have been really popular and the seniors ones have been booked out. The feedback has been really positive.' The Council's target is to double the number of trips in the area between 2015–2025.

Leichardt Municipality is just one of a number of councils across Australia offering cycling training programs.

A network of Austcycle approved cycling educators offers cycling training programs to groups and individuals in a range of locations across Australia.

[www.austcycle.com.au/AustCycle-Providers/Find-a-Provider](http://www.austcycle.com.au/AustCycle-Providers/Find-a-Provider)



Offstreet classes develop confidence.

# Tips for using Twitter to promote your event

Whether it's a conference, a community meeting or the launch of a new program, using Twitter means you can expand the size of the audience taking part and spread the word about the great work your organisation does.



Here's our tips for using Twitter to promote your event:

**1 Give your event a unique hashtag before you send out invites**

This allows other people to follow the event and contribute comments before, during and after it's over.

**2 Announce your hashtag at the same time you announce your event**

Include this hashtag on all material you produce to promote the event.

**3 Co-brand if you're holding your event in conjunction with another organisation or umbrella event**

For example, if you're launching a new program during Adult Learners' Week use the #ALW2016 hashtag along with your event hashtag. This way, anyone already following #ALW2016 on Twitter will also see information about your event.

**4 Encourage people to follow you on Twitter**

Add your Twitter handle to staff signature blocks, press releases, on emails, posters and flyers, your website and other social media such as Facebook.

**5 Tweet using your hashtag before the event**

Build interest by sharing relevant and interesting information. For example, tweet fun tidbits or interesting facts, pictures from last year's event, or program announcements. Mention any guest speakers

so they can spread the word about their involvement ahead of time.

**6 Nominate a live tweeter or two before the event**

Brief your tweeters on ways to increase interaction and engagement with followers on the day.

**7 In your welcome address, announce that you will be tweeting live and remind people what the hashtag is**

Ensure any signage or presentation material features your event hashtag as a ready reminder.

**8 Encourage people to tweet their observations, opinions, or pictures during the event**

When people tweet live, they promote your event to people not there who may want to become involved as a result.

**9 Follow your event hashtag yourself**

You can get immediate feedback on successes and issues, so you can respond in real-time. For example, if the keynote speaker is inaudible to people in the back row? Fix that microphone.

**10 After the event tell people how successful it was**

Describe what was accomplished, and include a link to your website or mailing list for people who want to stay in touch.

Photo credit:  
[Live blogging](#), CC BY-SA 2.0

Putting a # sign in front of a word or group of words on Twitter turns the word or phrase into a searchable link.

# ALA Board News

At our recent AGM we farewelled outgoing members of our board and welcomed new ones. Here's a round up of the changes.



## NEW MEMBER

### Richard Vinycomb

Richard Vinycomb has a professional background in exploration geology, science and maths teaching, acting and directing for the theatre. He even had a stint as a program manager for community arts policy for The Australia Council. Since 1990, he has run two award winning adult education centres in NE Victoria and currently on the Far North Coast of NSW. He is on an ASQA reference group, a local government business incubation group, and the Board of Co-operative Learning Ltd.

'I came to adult education via a background in community theatre and arts. And there are some similarities when you think about it. Good education is like good theatre. Whether it's a science class, a session on early childhood development or first aid training, a good educator knows how to connect with people and share their passion. Look at someone like science journalist Robyn Williams. He is a terrific storyteller, his curiosity is fascinating and he connects you to his world. Good educators do that – the way they communicate their world view is just as important as what they are communicating.

'Adult education and the creative pursuits are similar in other ways. They both share a vulnerable side when it comes to persuading others of the need for continued funding. Bureaucrats and politicians can have real trouble making sense of something like adult education because its value can't always be translated into statistical measures and outcomes such as jobs and impact on the economy.

'A continuing source of tension for those of us working on the ground in this sector is that we well understand the impact of the work we do but we often struggle to communicate the value of that work with people who are far removed from listening to the stories directly.

'I believe in strong peak bodies, and ALA is an organisation I've always gravitated towards for its broad learning agenda and international links. I'm passionate about lifelong learning and I've had a lot of experience, even though my views are continually transforming.

'I've been a long-time active participant with ALA. I worked together with previous CEO Sally Thompson on projects that were both local and national. I've always been interested in complex ideas where you can pull things out of the too hard basket and find a learning solution for a difficult problem.'



## NEW MEMBER

### Sally Brennan

Sally works as an education consultant, and has a background in community development and adult community education. Until December 2014 she was CEO of Upper Yarra Community House, a position she held for twenty two years. Sally has tertiary qualifications in community development and education, including a Master of Education from Monash University. She has also managed state-wide projects in education for offenders and young people, and more recently has been consultant to the Learn Local peak body, Adult Community Education (ACE) Vic. Sally has significant and longstanding experience in working with government at all levels, creating and maintaining local and regionally based services and community engagement, and working with industry and education and training providers to improve the learning outcomes of disadvantaged and vulnerable learners.

'I reckon I'm a great example of an adult learner. I grew up in a household where education was valued, prioritised and underpinned by the message that I could be whatever I chose to be. I was a ratty and naughty school kid despite the wonderful opportunities presented to me by my parents, and it wasn't until my thirties that the rubber hit the road. I embraced my university studies wholeheartedly, and there is still a little flame burning that keeps the idea of further study alive. As

I get older, I'm finding out how much I know, and the value of my learning that has come from study, life, parenting and my colleagues.

'In 22 years running a community house, the most important thing I discovered about lifelong learning was that every person wants to learn. Engagement in learning is such a personal thing, and relates to individual needs on many levels. There's a big difference between organisations who see education as a service to be provided, and those who see it as a genuine partnership with the learner. Communities change and grow when learning is a partnership. They are nourished and stimulated and you can feel it.

'There are still major challenges ahead in achieving recognition of the value of community-based learning. There are vast tracts of uncharted territory where a community-learning model could make an enormous difference in the lives of adult learners from many walks of life, not to mention its value to the economy, which lies in its approach and its cost effectiveness. It should have a much a bigger place in the education and training agenda of government as a significant element of their policy agenda.'

## Retiring board members

We were sad to say goodbye to retiring long-time and valued board members **Barry Golding** and **Dorothy Lucardie**. Both have made valuable contributions to ALA over many years. We also farewelled **Rob Townsend** who in the past year has lent his energy and enthusiasm to the role of board secretary.

# Are you an ALA member?

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

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# QUEST

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