



Media Release

Is personal interest learning the key to improved health and wellbeing?

Higher levels of self-esteem, along with better physical and mental health and wellbeing are some of the hidden benefits for Australian adults undertaking learning for leisure, recreation and personal enrichment according to the Australian Adult and Community Education Environmental Scan 2016, released in the run-up to this year's Adult Learners' Week.

These benefits are particularly important for both older and the youngest Australian adults, says Christine McCall, President of Adult Learning Australia's Board.

"Currently 1.4 million Australians participate in personal interest learning with people aged 65 to 74 years and 15 to 19 years participating at the highest rate," says McCall. "Our research shows that personal interest learning is contributing to healthy, productive ageing, ensuring that older Australians remain active members of the community and workforce for longer.

"Younger Australians are also finding that they can apply the knowledge and skills gained from personal interest learning to their jobs, or as a gateway into other learning activities, particularly those who are disengaged with more formal types of learning."

Adult Learning Australia's research findings form part of an emerging international body of evidence on the hidden benefits of lifelong learning.

The UK's Department of Business Innovation and Skills found that adult learning has more than twice the impact on self-confidence than does being employed. A report by the UK's Mental Health Foundation, 'Learning for life, adult learning, mental health and wellbeing', concluded that community-based adult learning programs provide a simple low cost way of helping to reduce symptoms of mild to moderate depression and anxiety.

School gardener and community horticulture program mentor from Bunbury, WA, Suzie Boyle, couldn't agree more with this growing body of evidence.

"I was definitely in a bad place personally when I began my horticultural training. It really did save my life and I'm now working as a landscape gardener. There is a great need for this kind of education and learning, which recognises that not everybody learns in the same way. There are so many people suffering from mental illness. They isolate themselves from society and society isolates them as well," says Boyle. "Adult education was certainly a big part of my road back to health, and back into society."

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2/...Is personal interest learning the key to improved health and wellbeing?

Adelaide Justice of the Peace and active community organisation leader, Jan Cook, credits a six-month Community Leadership Program offered by her local Council with helping find a new direction in life.

“The course has given me the self belief I can do whatever I choose to do, and the world is open to me if I want it to be. I went on from that course to complete several certificates in volunteer management and an Advance Diploma of Community Sector Management, so it really was my pathway back into education, and to building the life that I wanted for myself,” says Cook.

‘Learn outside the square’ is the theme for Adult Learners’ Week, which takes place from the 1–8 of September. “Adult Learners’ Week is the ideal time for all Australians to explore the numerous educational and personal interest learning alternatives provided by adult and community education centres, Neighbourhood Houses, libraries and local councils throughout the country with events, information seminars and practical demonstrations taking place around the country during the first week of September,” says Christine McCall.

“I think we’ve all heard stories of people gaining new found confidence and self belief from ongoing learning,” says McCall. “We now have the evidence from our own research and around the world that not only is this the case, but that there are very tangible and ongoing sociological, mental and physical health benefits for both the individual and society as a by-product of people’s personal learning journeys,” concludes McCall.

A copy of the Australian ACE Environmental Scan 2016: Insights into scope and scale of ACE providers, programs, participants and outcomes and national policies supported can be accessed at <https://ala.asn.au>. Adult and community education providers are significant providers of all personal interest learning undertaken in Australia and many of the participants are from disadvantaged groups.

Visit www.adultlearnersweek.org, call 1300 I LEARN (1300 453 276) or search @adultlearnerswk on Facebook to find out more learning outside the square in your neighbourhood.

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