

## Follow up Submission to the Review of Indigenous Training and Employment by Adult Learning Australia

### About Us

Adult Learning Australia (ALA) is the peak body for Adult and Community Education (ACE) in Australia with both individual and organizational members in every state and territory of Australia. Our mission is to achieve equitable access to Lifelong and Lifewide Learning for All Australians. Indigenous Adult Education is one of Adult Learning Australia's eight key areas of its policy platform.

### Overall Response

As the peak body for Adult Education in Australia, we were pleased to see the report identify the intergenerational nature of adult literacy and the profound impact that education of adults has on the educational experiences of their children. It was heartening to read on page 70;

Early childhood development and adult literacy are often discussed as separate topics, yet the interrelatedness of these concepts is of utmost importance. Research shows that the most effective services to support lifelong learners begin at birth, involve families, target the poorest children, are sufficiently intensive and long-lasting, and are holistic—they include health, nutrition, and parenting. Services need to support both the parent and the child.

Supporting first Australian parents who need support to become literate and numerate so they can be their child's first teacher is just as critical a life skill as a job skill. Literacy and numeracy support is covered in Chapter 5.

However, when the report gets to Chapter 5, there is then no mention of intergenerational literacy (also known as family literacy) or lifeskills programs of the type described above.

Professor Michael Christie from Charles Darwin University has suggested that investment in adult education would be the single most effective tool in improving NAPLAN results in Indigenous schools and that adult education was used effectively in the 1970s in the Northern Territory to build and sustaining school attendance. (<https://theconversation.com/listen-to-your-elders-inviting-aboriginal-parents-back-to-school-31300>)

### Adult Literacy and Life skills

We share the concerns expressed in the report about the churn within VET Certificates 1 and 2. However for many Indigenous peoples and communities Certs 1 and 2 are the only available adult education options for those with low English language literacy. The report makes no recommendation for replacing these with more effective literacy, numeracy and lifeskills training for fulltime carers including grandparents. As our original submission stated: "entry level VET is an ineffective and expensive substitute for properly constructed community based literacy and lifeskills programs". We support the removal of "training for training sake" however this has to be replaced with high quality literacy, numeracy and lifeskills programs at the community level, preferably integrated with local schools.

The report notes that there was little improvement in adult literacy rates between the 2006 Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALLS) and the 1996 International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) a decade prior. In contrast, New Zealand saw significant improvement between these two surveys particularly amongst Indigenous adults. This is partly because of the "Whānau (family) first" school based Adult Education programs that are a feature of the New Zealand education system.

Our research has identified a pattern of very high quality grassroots whole of family and whole of community literacy programs developed through initiatives of individual agencies, Universities, library systems and church diocese which struggle to get past the pilot stage, or which die on the vine due to lack of systemic support. If funding for entry level VET were redirected to these programs, the

impacts on school completion would be significant. We mention in particular the Wilcannia, “Yes We Can” literacy campaign, the WA libraries Better Beginnings program and Australian Nurse – Family Partnerships Program run by Central Australian Aboriginal Congress.

### **Community Based Learning**

The report rightly points out that workplace-based learning has to exist within the framework of a real job outcome. The same principle applies to literacy and lifeskills programs. The research shows that these work best when they are developed at the grassroots level for a genuine and pressing community need such as to sell your artworks through a social enterprise, to support children in school with their homework, to care for a new baby, get a drivers license, or to fix your car.

### **Recommendations:**

We respectfully draw to the attention of the review the recommendations suggested in our original submission:

- 1) Community based adult literacy, numeracy and lifeskills programs for Indigenous adults should be funded separately from the general Vocational Education and Training system.
- 2) Community based adult literacy, numeracy and lifeskills programs for Indigenous adults should be held to a more appropriate set of quality indicators and accountabilities than those applied to the mainstream VET system.
- 3) All Australian schools with a high population of Indigenous students should have a comprehensive family literacy program.
- 4) ABS surveys of literacy, learning and participation should include Indigeneity as a data category so that progress can be measured.