

## Family lessons in homework



Helping with homework improves communication between parents and children.

After school on Mondays and Tuesdays, a group of families speaking any one of a number of languages – Tamil, Hindi, Arabic, Burmese – arrive for a two-hour class at the William Langford Community House in suburban Perth. The parents go to one room, the children go to another. They are part of a successful homework program involving refugee kids and their parents.

Children whose parents have low literacy and numeracy skills are less successful at school. But the problem's even worse for refugee families. Poor English, isolation

and unfamiliarity with local services and the school system makes it hard for parents to help a child who is struggling academically.

The demands of settling into a new country and trying to put an often traumatic past behind them are often much larger worries for newly arrived refugee families.

The Families Learning Together Project, a new intergenerational program, is aiming to break the cycle. It aims to improve parents' literacy as well as their understanding and engagement with the education ► [page 3](#)

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# Message from the CEO

## Happy Adult Learners' Week!

This year's theme, I Learn, You Learn, We Learn focuses on intergenerational learning. You may recognise the image used in our posters and on the [adultlearnersweek.org](http://adultlearnersweek.org) website as it appeared in a recent edition of *Quest*. The image was taken at a Townsville based mentoring program where older men in the community worked alongside and supported young people who were attempting to complete their schooling; a fabulous initiative having positive impacts in the lives of both groups.

There are a number of terrific intergenerational learning and literacy programs around Australia that recognise that children's and young people's education doesn't occur in a bubble disconnected from that of their parents and grandparents. In fact, a number of research papers have suggested

that parents' experiences and success in education are the most significant indicator of a child's success in school, more than methodology, teacher training and even more than socioeconomic status.

UNESCO promotes family literacy programs because they contribute to four of the six Education for All goals:

- Goal 1: The expansion and improvement of comprehensive early childhood care and education
- Goal 2: Universal primary education
- Goal 3: Achieving a 50% increase in adult literacy levels by 2015
- Goal 4: Gender equity in education

Unfortunately, despite a vast array of good practice grassroots examples, Australia has never had the coordinated policy approach to, or support for intergenerational programs that other countries, such as New Zealand, have enjoyed. Australia's policy adherence to human capital theory and other individualist neo-Liberal approaches means that models

that have positive outcomes at the family, community and broader societal level are often overlooked.

A good example is the recent Forrest Review of Indigenous Training and Employment, which used the term 'training for training sake' to include all learning other than workplace learning for those in the workforce. I was recently interviewed by Joe O'Brien for ABC News 24 about our submission to the Review because we pointed out the myriad reasons why adults need to learn other than for their current job with their current employer, including the very important role of supporting children with their education and acting as a positive learning role model.

Family and community approaches to learning have a strong basis in research. There are terrific examples of programs that we celebrate this Adult Learners' Week. We look forward to working with state and territory governments to build on these, particularly for Indigenous and other socially and economically marginalised families.

**Sally Thompson**  
CEO

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system as a way to improve their child's school performance.

Four community centres in remote, regional and metropolitan WA have run a pilot program. The pilot was so successful that five more centres are rolling the program out this year.

The idea for such a program was sparked during a brainstorming session three years ago at a Perth meeting of librarians and community groups. Maria Cavill, manager of the William Langford Community House who was at the meeting was concerned about asylum seeker and refugee children experiencing difficulties with school. And she was looking sponsorship for a program to do something about it.

'The parents' priorities are how to survive, how to recover from and overcome psychological trauma and move on. The kids are trying to do the same and often their schoolwork is suffering. But because their parents don't understand the Australian curriculum, the kids are often struggling on their own.'

Linkwest, the State Association for Community, Neighbourhood and Learning Centres, with funding from the Office of Multicultural Affairs, selected William Langford Community House as one of the four centres to run a pilot.



Kids do better at school.

Using the curriculum developed by Linkwest as a guide, tutors teach the parents about the Australian education system and practical strategies to help them with their children's schooling. As well as offering help in literacy and numeracy – around half of the parents can't read or write – tutors take the group to the local library and link them to services in the community that can help their child.

Maria says the biggest issue has been gaining parents' trust. 'Most refugees who have come through the camps have developed a

mistrust of NGOs. So when they first arrived for classes they were very wary and didn't talk much.' 'Many of the parents are isolated. They don't know who to ask for information or who to approach. They don't even approach their neighbours.'

Finding a common language was also tricky, with people from Sri Lanka, Burma, India, China, Afghanistan and Sudan. 'Their English was very broken but halfway through they started to open up and make friends with other parents. Now they walk together from school to home and ask one another questions about homework.'



Parents and children learn together.

Progress is slow in terms of the adults' literacy, Maria says. 'But it's getting there.' Ninety per cent of parents have joined free English conversation classes at the centre as well as art and craft classes.

Maria notices big changes in the communication between parent and child. 'Because of the trauma these families have suffered and their often horrendous experiences before they arrived in Australia they have stopped talking. It's a big step to see them sharing and discussing things together.'

When a parent can't read or write English, a child often becomes the family interpreter, missing school



to attend appointments with their parents at the doctor or to agencies like Centrelink. Children often take on the role of adult and tend to think of themselves as smarter than their parents, Maria says. But in this program the emphasis is on helping each other. 'A child might discover his mother is quite good at numeracy and can help him out. The parent might then be able to ask the child for help understanding a word.'

One Sri Lankan woman and her son attended every session in term 1, and then returned again in term 2. 'The mother was very shy. She had no English. After joining English classes she became a volunteer at the centre. She helps with the after school kids program and helps prepare material, uses the computer, types out plans. It might seem routine or menial work to us but to her it's a very big thing. Her relationship with her son is getting better. At the start of the year they were very reserved with one another. Now they talk to each other and make jokes. It's healthy.'

'When people have been through horrific circumstances they go into their shell. It takes time for them to start to trust people. You can see this change in her but you can also see it in her son. He now comes along to the after school activity program and is joining in much more with the Australian children.'

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Mihaela Nicolescu, centre development officer at Linkwest, says the project's lessons plans for both children and parents, supporting material and handouts that were developed by qualified teachers, had to be both comprehensive and flexible.

'It was a challenge because it certainly is not a 'one size fits all' approach. Parents differ not just in terms of their skills in literacy and numeracy, but in their formal qualifications. For some parents their own literacy and numeracy skills are quite low while other parents may have completed higher

degrees. Then you need to take into account different learning styles, and differences in the amount of information and understanding they have of their local education system.'

Personalising resources so that they were relevant to each group was critical, as was finding tutors who could facilitate and adapt the material for their local group. 'Tailoring the program to ensure parents don't feel it's patronising, or that they are being taught things that are basic is key', Mihaela says. Linkwest also developed a facilitation course so that centres who took part could run the course well.

The practicalities of running the pilot gave Mihaela and her team useful feedback. The requirement that families involved have been in Australia for two years or less became a hurdle. 'The first two years in a new country are very demanding for a family and the feedback indicates that those who've been here longer benefit the most.'

Secondly, the age range of the children presented challenges. 'There's a massive difference between an 8 year old and a 12 year old. It isn't age as much as the differences in literacy levels that is important.'

As a result of the courses, all parents felt more confident giving help with homework and children were more likely to ask for it. As a result, children in the program are doing better at school. 'If parents encourage children to learn by learning with them it creates a positive culture that's essential to the children's success.'

Mihaela says the pilot has reinforced the potential of programs like this to effect change not just at an individual or family level but to society at large which benefits from the social effects of improved school participation and improved literacy and numeracy. 'The potential is huge, the interest is huge, and the research on intergenerational learning is very encouraging.'

# All Abilities pitch in for event success



The 'All Abilities Essential Skills' for Work Group.

Organising and running an awards night for a 250-strong basketball team is no mean feat. But the gala event for the Doncaster All Abilities Basketball Competition went smoothly thanks to the behind-the-scenes work of a group of students at Pines Learning in Melbourne's Doncaster East.

Organising the awards night and making sure it went without a hitch was part of the All Abilities – Essential Skills for Work course, which is designed to provide hands on opportunities for people with high-functioning disabilities to develop work and independent living skills.

Jenny Carson, VET coordinator at Pines Learning in Melbourne's Doncaster East says the course was developed as a way of re-engaging young people in learning. 'We realised there was a real gap in services. Some of these learners had found jobs but hadn't been able to keep them due to problems with punctuality, absenteeism or falling out with their co-workers. Others hadn't found work and were at home and feeling increasingly isolated.'

'Planning and organising such an event teaches students skills

that are directly transferable to the workplace and to their everyday life. Students were responsible for liaison with speakers and the MC, briefing the photographer, booking the venue, organising entertainment and keeping track of expenses and organisational details. In the process they learned how to work effectively with others, time management, communication skills, computer and budgeting skills.'



Daniel is more confident and outgoing.

Staff of the Centre learned a lot through the process, Jenny said. 'In the past people with disabilities had been integrated into our mainstream classes, so devising a tailored class for this group was something new for us.'

Staff worried about whether they'd be able to meet all the needs of a group with a diverse range of abilities. Some people were more independent than others, including a couple who were able to drive. Staff had to write a program, find a trainer and a support person.

Jenny said Pines Learning staff were 'blown away' by the organisational skills and attention to detail that participants demonstrated. 'The awards night was a huge success.'

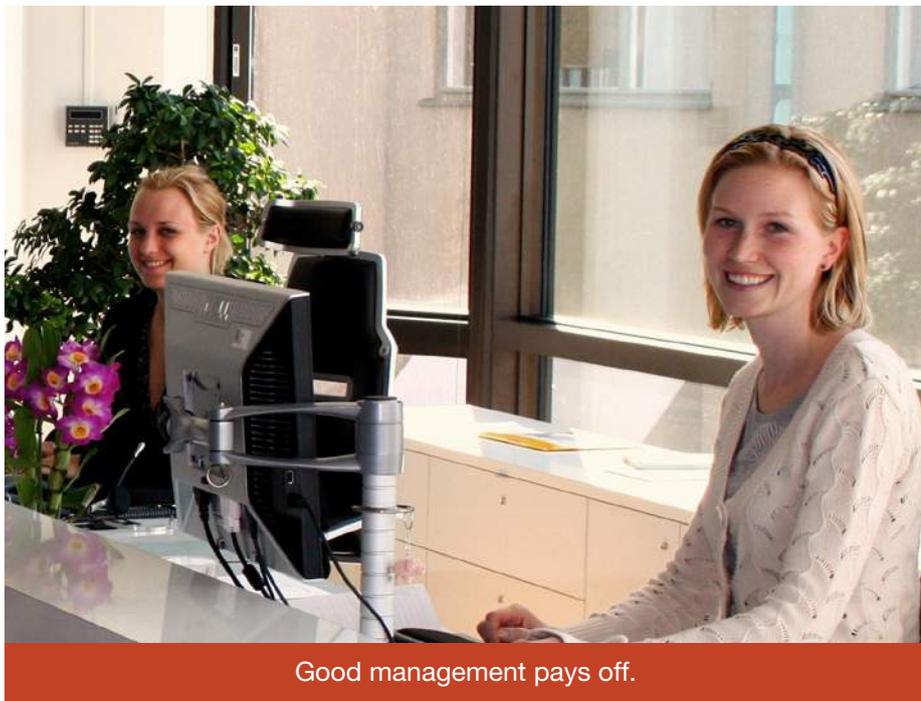
'It's been great for our centre,' Jenny says. 'It's built our confidence, broadened the range of students we can accommodate and given us a real sense of satisfaction. Plus it's been a lot of fun.'

As a result Pines Learning have opened up the course to all people with high functioning disabilities in the wider community.

When 24 year old Daniel arrived at the information session at Pines Learning in July 2013 he was very shy. He didn't speak to or interact with anyone that day. But he did go ahead and enrol in the All Abilities course. These days he participates actively in group activities and looks for chances to take on responsibility such as formally thanking a recent guest speaker on behalf of the group. He talks to staff en route to class and for two terms has worked as a volunteer in the main office. He always arrives early and is keen to get down to work. He's also enrolled in Zumba at the Centre and volunteers at the local Rotary opportunity shop.

**Being a supportive manager pays off. Staff are more likely to enjoy their work and your agency is more likely to achieve its goals. But managing your paid staff successfully takes planning, time and commitment.**

**Here are some tips for doing it well.**



Good management pays off.

job and how the job's working for them. But staff need to feel that it's a useful exercise. Involve staff in the development of the process and the paperwork – which doesn't need to be complicated – and make sure they're happy with it.

**7. Don't put off uncomfortable conversations**

Good day-to-day management and regular performance reviews are likely to prevent staff underperformance but there'll be times when issues arise. Let the staff member know they've done something inappropriate or worrying straightaway. Don't stew over it. For example, take a latecomer aside and say 'I notice you've been coming in late, is there a problem?' Don't assume you know the answer and adopt a joint problem solving approach. If this is really difficult for you, get training or practice with a trusted colleague or friend.

**8. Know your limits**

Sometimes you'll reach the limits of your expertise and confidence. It's important to think ahead about where to get professional advice. If you do need to consult an Employment Relations advisor, do it early and allow time for them to respond.

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These tips are based on an ALA webinar by Penny Sara. For the full webinar with lots more advice and information, go to the [ALA website](#).

Image: Receptionists by [Magnus Manske](#). [CC-BY-2.0](#)

**1. Adopt the mindset**

Understand the role you're taking on and what it means. If staff management is new to you, get training for yourself and others involved to make a successful shift to this role.

**2. Know your systems and processes**

Save time and prevent problems by making sure you are familiar with the range of HR issues that can arise including details of awards and legislation. Have the relevant documents handy for ready reference.

**3. Have regular one-on-one meetings**

Give this a central place in your work life. Meeting with individual staff helps them feel supported and allows you to monitor what they are doing in a proactive and systematic way.

**4. Make the most of team meetings**

Team meetings are a chance for staff to be accountable to their peers as well as to you, so allow time for people to report on projects and tasks. Have regular team meetings and use the time to plan, share, and problem solve.

**5. Be a good role model**

Demonstrate the behaviour you would like all staff to adopt. Be respectful, help staff feel supported and communicate your interest in their work. Avoid postponing meetings and encourage them to take initiative. You want to be able to rely on your staff and feel confident when you are away that they can manage in your absence.

**6. Hold regular and meaningful performance reviews**

Good performance reviews take time out to focus on a person and how they are feeling about their

# Flying the flag for sustainability

**Don't do I say, do as I do. It could be the motto of Heyfield Community Resource Centre in Gippsland, Victoria. The Centre's inspired and educated its local community in energy efficiency.**

The Sustainable Smart Town project which started around five years ago was the brainchild of Centre staff who were looking for ways to spread the word about saving energy, saving money and saving the environment.

The Centre developed and introduced a three-stage flag program to encourage households and businesses to be assessed for their energy efficiency. A white, blue or green flag flying signals progress towards sustainability.

Community support and interest in the project was immediate and the Centre now has 380 buildings signed up, participating and actively involved.

Buildings flying the white flag are those who've adopted simple



steps to track and save energy. Blue flags show that the owners have installed outside elements such as awnings on western windows to reduce the need for air conditioning in summer. The green flag signals that solar panels or solar hot water systems are in use.

Staff interviewed people outside the local shopping centre, demonstrating ways people could make small changes and reap immediate benefits. The

Centre found that members of the community were keen for information and once they could see the benefits, were motivated to make more improvements and bigger changes.

Everyone who uses the Centre is educated informally about how to save power and money. The Centre is equipped with solar panels, solar hot water and uses clever signage throughout the Centre and its garden to demonstrate energy saving practices and how they pay off.

And of course, the white, blue and green flags fly high on the front of the building, a visual reminder to passers-by that Heyfield Community Resource Centre leads the way in energy efficiency and sustainability.

Want to know more?

Find out more about how to build energy efficient communities at [www.agreenhouse.net.au](http://www.agreenhouse.net.au) or follow [A Green House Around the Corner](#) on Facebook.



# Adult Learners' Week



The theme for this year's Adult Learners' Week is 'I Learn, You Learn, We Learn'.

What better way is there to sum up the power of learning from each other?

People of all ages can learn together and from each other. Learning from each other is an important part of lifelong learning.

Here at ALA we've very excited at the prospect of Adult Learners' Week and we're so looking forward to having this week celebrated around the country.

## Win an iPad

This year we are encouraging everyone to take a learning pledge. We will be giving away one iPad mini (32GB WiFi) each day of Adult Learners' Week 2014.

For your chance to win, all you need to do is choose or share your learning pledge, complete the form on the [Adult Learners' Week website](#) and upload your image for us to share on ALW's social media platforms.

## Hold a special Adult Learners' Week event

If your organisation offers any form of adult learning such as courses, classes, lectures, exhibitions, tours,



training programs, tutoring, discussion groups – then Adult Learners' Week is an opportunity to celebrate and promote what you do.

You could hold an open day, set up a display at work or in a community centre, host a learning expo, present demonstrations or performances – anything that offers members of your organisation or the local community an opportunity to find out where you are and what you do.

Once you have an event planned, post it to the Adult Learners' Week Facebook page so that people can find you.

To follow, support and share news of the amazing variety of adult learners around Australia, follow [Adult Learner's Week](#) on Facebook, Adult Learning Australia on Twitter (#ALW2014) and share with us your celebrations and highlights.

Whether you're in a small centre in a rural town, in a buzzing city suburb or somewhere in between, we wish you a wonderful week.



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## Member News

Adult educator and journalist Michael Newman has revamped [his website](#) and is encouraging ALA members to visit and access his free books and articles about adult education.

### Books

*Macler's Regard: Images of Adult Learning.* (For a taster, visit the site, download the book, and go to pages 143–45.)

*Defining the Enemy: Adult Education in Social Action.* (For a taster, download the book, and go to pages 5–7.)

*The Third Contract: Theory and Practice of Trade Union Training.* (Although this book is aimed at trade union trainers, it is also a survey of the literature of adult education and adult learning. For a taster, download the book, and go to pages 11–14.)

'Credit where credit is due in non-credit adult education' is an article celebrating that simple yet profound experience of adults gathering together to learn.



## We are moving

We are moving from Melbourne's CBD to Footscray in September. We've loved our time in the centre of Melbourne but we'll be swapping the city buzz for the beautiful banks of the Maribyrnong river. Our new office will be in the Footscray Community Arts Centre, 45 Moreland Street, Footscray. Phone: 03 9689 8623.

# Licence to learn



It's not often you get a group of students aged 17 to 70 in the same classroom. But a course at Adelaide's Bagster Road Community Centre is attracting people from all walks of life. What they all have in common is a desire to drive.

Getting in the car and driving to work, to the shops or to visit friends is something most of us take for granted. And it's easy to forget that the whole process of learning to drive can't happen without getting your learner's permit first.

'People who don't drive can be seriously disadvantaged. They can have trouble getting jobs, can be socially isolated and life is just more stressful,' Michelle Grinter, neighbourhood development coordinator and co-ordinator of the Getting Your Learners Permit class says.

You only have to see the impact of getting a driver's licence on people's lives to appreciate the full effect, Michelle says.

'One of my students was a young woman with five children under the age of 6. It freed up so many

more opportunities for her after she learned to drive.'

Another former student was a young woman who came from a disadvantaged single parent family. 'I ran into her at Big W where she was working. She told me that once she got her driver's licence and a car, she got a job. Now she was able to support herself as well as help her mum by running her brothers and sisters around. She was also studying too.'

But studying for and sitting for the learner's permit test can be a huge hurdle for some people. Some students have tried and failed the test a number of times before. It wasn't until the day of the final test when the person from Transport SA recognised one of her students that Michelle learned that the student – a middle aged woman from a non English speaking background

– had tried and failed the test 39 times before. When she passed, the instructor said, 'I can't believe she passed!'

'They're a real mixed bag,' Michelle says. 'In the same group we have people who never learned to drive because they've been in prison, or because their partner who has just died did all the driving, or because they have a mental health problem like anxiety or ADHD that's really limited them when it comes to learning.'

Having a learner's permit and learning to drive has a big impact on people's work and study options, but the biggest outcomes aren't tangible Michelle says. 'They are the sorts of thing you can see but that are hard to measure like increased confidence self awareness and self respect.'

For some people, being back in a classroom is a milestone in itself. For others, working as part of a group, the chance to learn and share in other's success is a new experience.

The course gives those with limited social skills the opportunity to build self confidence and feel a sense of achievement that has a flow-on effect into other areas of their lives.

And for most of her students, these kinds of flow-on effects are common. For one teenage boy with a severe learning difficulty, getting his learner's permit gave him the confidence to sit school tests. 'His mother couldn't thank me enough.'

What started as a school holiday program for local high school students in 2004 has become a magnet for people from all walks of life.

Michelle was a volunteer at Bagster Road Community Centre ten years ago when she was looking to develop a course that would be

relevant to the needs and interests of local high school students. Getting their learner's permit seemed a good choice.

Apart from covering the road rules, Michelle includes visits from the police to learn about fines, guest speakers from Consumer Affairs to talk about what to look out for when buying a car and how to spot finance and used car scams. A driving instructor visits to talk about the process of taking driving lessons. At the end of the course, each student does their test with Transport SA.

Michelle uses a range of strategies to engage with her learners, using model cars to make examples practical and easy to visualise. 'We go through every possible road rule and make sure they fully understand it and can use the model cars to demonstrate the variations of each rule.' Michelle includes a mock test so students can identify which areas they need to work on before the final test.

The book of road rules that students need to learn is a serious challenge for people with literacy problems, Michelle says. 'A big part of the job is translating the text and getting rid of jargon so people can understand it and apply it to real life situations.' Students are encouraged to use mnemonics to help them simplify the process and remember the elements of a range of rules.

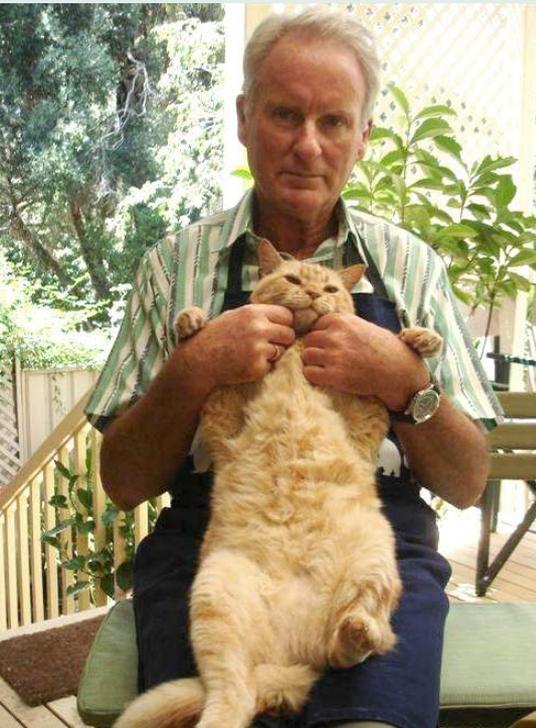
Michelle has run the course for 3000 people in the past ten years. Ninety eight per cent of her students pass the learner's permit test. 'If I had a dollar for everyone who hugged me and kissed me and thanked me I'd be a millionaire by now.'

The two per cent who fail do so because they haven't done any study outside of the class. 'I guarantee students that if they do the homework and understand the rules they'll pass the test.'

'I'm proud of putting safer road users out on the road. And I've become a better driver myself.'



Using practical examples and model cars helps learners visualise.



Paul Mulroney has recently been co-opted to join the ALA Board. Paul is well known to the South Australian ACE sector as the Workforce Development Manager at Community Centres SA. He has a background in adult language, literacy and numeracy.

#### When and how did your own involvement with adult learning start?

I was a primary and secondary school teacher for around 30 years. I grasped the opportunity to enter adult learning in 1999. I have worked as a practitioner and manager of the Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program (LLNP) now the SEE Program. I have worked at TAFE SA as a part-time lecturer and travelled Australia as a private RTO lecturer in Cert. IV in Training and Assessment and other qualifications. I am currently involved in working with ACE providers to develop and deliver programs that have maximum benefit for learners.

#### What do you see as best practice when it comes to adult learning?

It's vital to build a rapport with each learner and to get to know him or her. Understanding how each person learns and helping to put their learning into a context that makes sense for them is really important. But it's just as important to make learning fun, too. I think patience is really key. You've got to allow learners to work at their own pace and ensure that they understand and are able to transfer what they are learning to the own lives.

#### Why do you think an organisation like ALA is important and what do you hope to contribute?

ALA is important because it reaches a national audience and has access to a vast wealth of knowledge and experience through its membership and outreach. The organisation presents a balance between theory of learning and practitioner experience which keeps its offerings grounded and practical. I hope to be able to contribute in whatever way I can through my own experience as a VET practitioner with 15 years experience in VET and nearly 45 years of experience in education.

#### How do you continue to learn in your own life?

I learn through my interactions with other practitioners, by listening to how they do things and gleaning new ideas, strategies and reflections from our conversations and my own observations. I read websites and publications to keep up to date on current thinking in the VET industry. I see every encounter – whether it's an informal meeting or a large conference – as an opportunity to learn. I like to reflect upon what I achieve and through trial and analysis incorporate new ideas into my current practice.

#### About Quest

Quest is the national magazine for adult and community education. It is published four times a year by Adult Learning Australia.

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