

Official welcome

Director LINC Tasmania, Liz Jack

I am thrilled to have the opportunity to officially welcome you all to Hobart for the 54th Adult Learning Australia Conference.

For those of you visiting from interstate, I wish you a special welcome to Tasmania, and hope you've been able to spend at least part of the long weekend experiencing what Dark Mofo, Dark Park and the Winter Feast have to offer in and around Hobart.

If not, I'm sure you'll have the chance to take part in some of our fine dining experiences and cultural offerings over the next couple of days.

It's been nine years since the Ministerial Declaration on Adult Community Education was signed. And in those years, we've seen an explosion in the demand for high-quality and diverse learning opportunities for adults who are increasingly interested in continuing their education journey.

With the advent of all things 'i' – from iPods, iPhones, iPads and iTunes, to the devices that soon followed them, adult learners have never before been more engaged in emerging technology.

I certainly know my 83-year-old mother would be lost without her iPhone, iPod, iPad and the internet!

In terms of learning, while adults seek information for a variety of reasons, it's generally accepted that they have a specific learning outcome in mind. It may be:

- that they want to upskill or retrain to achieve their work-related goals;
- or they might want to gain specific knowledge in a particular area, such as mastering Facebook or learning to sew;

- or they might simply want to engage for the sheer enjoyment of learning something new.

Many adults are capable and independent learners—and I wish I could say that this is the whole story. But sadly, we know there's much more to this picture.

With the current rate of technological change and the increasing amount of information and knowledge we need in our day-to-day lives, we also know the divide between those who are capable and confident learners and those who are not, is growing.

This divide means there are increasing numbers of adults:

- who don't participate in learning activities after they leave compulsory education;
- who don't identify as being a lifelong learner; and
- who already lack the skills and knowledge to undertake routine tasks that we all take for granted, or are certainly at risk of this happening to them.

In Tasmania, one in two adults don't have the literacy or numeracy skills they need to manage their day-to-day lives.

One in two. That means there are entire generations within the one family who are unable to engage in what we all see as a normal part of everyday life.

For these people, it's difficult or even impossible:

- to understand the instructions on their medicine labels;
- to manage a budget;
- to fill out a form;
- to locate something on the internet; or
- to ask for the help they so desperately need.

It's important to recognise that skilling people today for tomorrow's world is a complex and ever-changing responsibility.

But it's also the cornerstone by which we can develop capable, confident and contributing members of our society.

At LINC Tasmania, we cater for all these types of learners in a range of ways:

- We partner with RTOs to deliver accredited learning;
- We deliver a range of in-house, non-accredited learning in digital citizenship, work readiness, and lifestyle and recreation—to name a few;
- We work one-on-one and in small groups to deliver literacy training; and
- We promote the importance of literacy and numeracy through our 26TEN network, something you will hear a lot more about during the conference.

While many of us are working tirelessly at an individual or organisational level, associations such as Adult Learning Australia play a vital role

- raising broad awareness of the importance of creating learning opportunities for **all** Australian adults; and
- bringing together specialists in the field to share their knowledge, build a common understanding and enhance current practices to help build a literate, skilled and confident population.

Without the work of ALA, the task would be even more daunting than it is.

I thank ALA for bringing everyone together here in Hobart to focus on these incredibly important issues that are impacting on adult learning in Australia. And, in closing, I wish all of you well in your deliberations and discussions over the next two days. Your efforts are making a real difference to the lives of Australians right around the country.

Thank you.