



QUEST

ISSUE 2 2017

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Igniting the artistic spark

Since it opened its doors in 2009 Belconnen Arts Centre has aimed to fuel a love of and engagement with the arts among its increasingly diverse community.

The IGNITE Alternative Arts Academy established in 2015 is a program that puts inclusion front and centre. IGNITE aims to attract and engage people with physical and psychosocial disability, who often experience barriers and challenges in accessing the arts.

Whether participants are pursuing art as a hobby or a professional career, people with all levels of experience are encouraged to get involved.

'You feel like you're part of an arts community and that's wonderful. I have hearing impairment issues but I find the space here is very comfortable for me. I feel at home,' Jenelle.

For participants Jenelle and Tahlia, the program has opened doors to the arts community, introduced them to new skills, and created an environment for forming friendships.

Jenelle began the program three years ago, after a marriage marked by domestic violence ended in divorce and after a serious bout of depression.

'In that first class we had to make this huge picture of a sunflower using pastels, which I'd never used before and I was just blown away.'

Making art at IGNITE has had a powerful therapeutic effect on Jenelle and she's seen big changes in herself. 'I had a problem with hoarding and I'm slowly getting on top of it. Through the course I learnt a lot about myself and I'm getting better now.'

Like all participants, Jenelle has developed a personal learning plan tailored to her needs and interests with program officer Amie who supports and encourages

(Story continues on p. 3)

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

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**Adult
Learning
Australia**

*Lifelong and
lifewide learning
for all Australians*

Message from the CEO



The Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander peoples of this country have the longest continual practice of culture in the world. It is a privilege to be granted any opportunity to learn from elders and knowledge holders willing to share their practice.

Adult learning is increasingly relevant in today's fast paced and changing world. It not only helps us build a range of knowledge and skills for the workplace but also enhances individual empowerment and wellbeing, economic development and quality of life.

UNESCO has identified that, 'lifelong learning and the learning society have a vital role to play in empowering citizens and effecting a transition to sustainable societies'.

The positive parenting story in this issue is a great example of learning in action. This important program supports parents, like Caitlin and Jasmine, to develop life and parenting skills, and to hook into other community services.

Also in this issue, Charles Darwin University researcher Tracy Woodroffe explores ways that non-Indigenous educators could benefit from understanding Indigenous knowledge systems and approaches to education by building bridges between teachers and students, and transforming teaching and learning.

The Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander peoples of this country have the longest continual practice of culture in the world. It is a privilege to be granted any opportunity to learn from elders and knowledge holders willing to share their practice.

Then there is the article on the IGNITE Alternative Arts Academy, which aims to engage people with a disability so they can access the arts either as a hobby or as a professional career. The program has introduced newcomers to new skills, and created an environment for forming friendships.

Sustainable societies are ones in which everyone has an opportunity to thrive and reach their best potential and where people help each other in the process of learning and living. For some members of the community, there's a multiplicity of barriers (physical, cultural, physiological, financial, etc.) to overcome so it is heartening to see so many welcoming learning spaces in their various shapes and forms.

Many more ACE good practice examples were highlighted at the 54th ALA Conference recently held in Hobart, entitled Exploring Possibilities – Changing Lives. The program included a diverse range of keynote speakers, presenters, panelists, site visits and opportunities for networking. A National Lifelong Learning Statement was released by ALA and endorsed by Conference delegates. More about the conference can be found inside.

Finally, the theme of Adult Learners' Week this year is **'Take the leap, rediscover learning'**. The theme is designed to promote learning as a positive and joyful experience; which is something we need more of if we are to imagine a healthy, happy and hopeful future for all.

Jenny Macaffer

CEO



IGNITE participants are involved in collaborations that produce performances and exhibitions at local festivals, galleries and artspaces.

(story continued from p. 1)

participants in pursuit of their learning goals throughout the program.

Whether it's painting, sculpture, glasswork or printmaking, Jenelle has had a chance to try her hand in a range of artforms offered by practising artists at a range of arts organisations in the ACT.

'We learn so much from the tutors here. I love that they've done the hard work. They're the masters.

'When you're making art you become so absorbed in it, it is like a meditative state. You can't do the times tables in your head, you can't be thinking about a problem. It's very relaxing for the mind.

'I've come through depression, trauma, obsessive-compulsive disorder – everything. Making art seems to keep me sane.

'I don't just want to be in my own space in my sunroom working as an artist. I need the social side of being with others and learning from experienced people.'

Jenelle is inspired to show others that art can be a pathway to recovery. 'I'd like to give back and help other people who've come through terrible situations like mine.

'I remember when I started my self-esteem was lower than

'I feel it's so important to have a supportive network of people in your life. I've got more confidence, more independence. I feel a greater sense of inclusion and wellbeing,' Tahlia, 22.

the ground. Now my confidence has soared because I am so willing to have a go, to experiment. You don't know how it's going to work out so you have to not be afraid to try things out, to break the rules. That's what I love about art you can always break the rules.

'I actually now say I am an artist, I am creating art all the time. And I feel at home calling myself that. The title makes me feel good. It took art for me to find myself.'

Tahlia, 22 has been involved with IGNITE for 2 years.

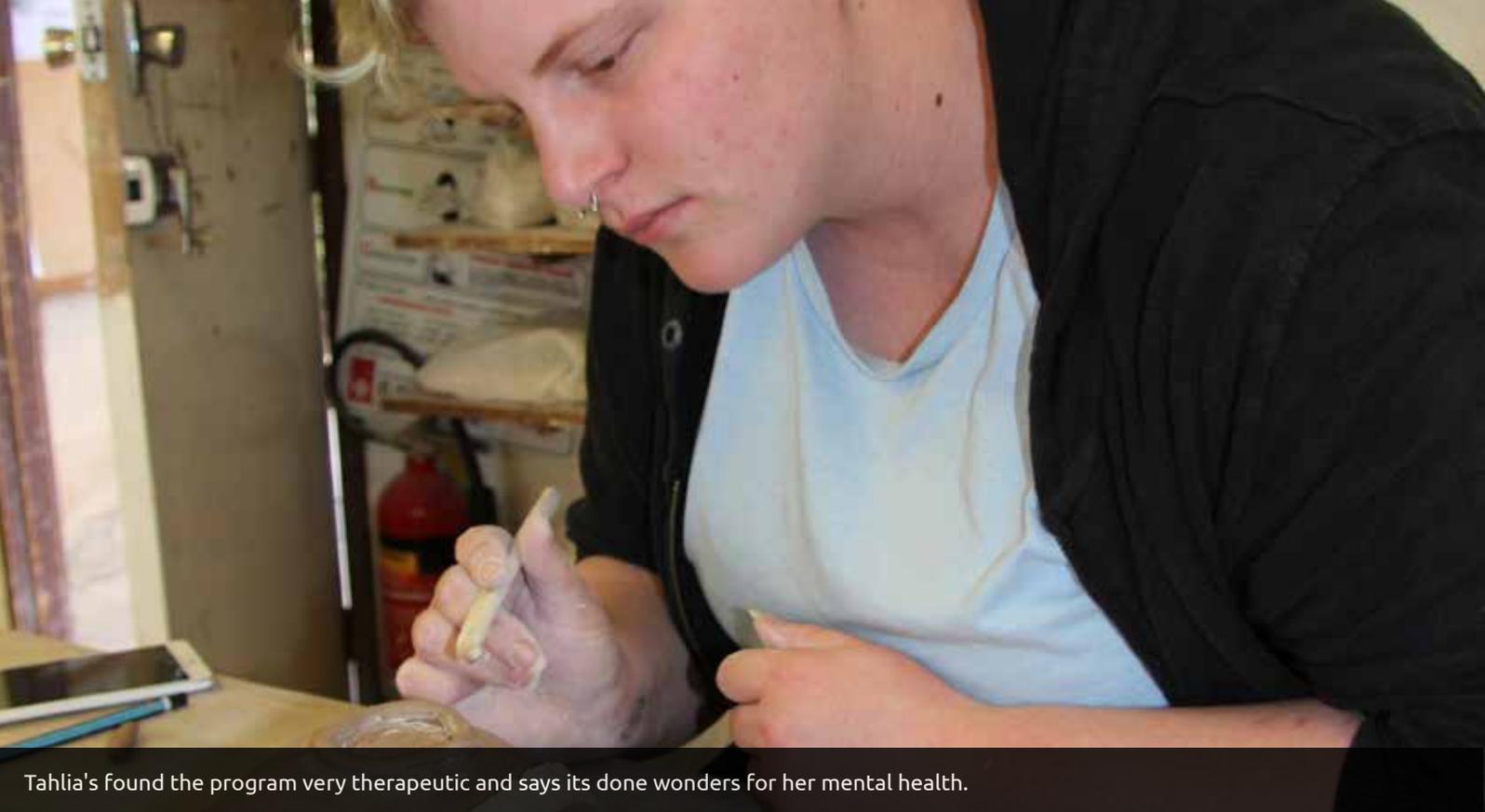
'The IGNITE program seemed perfect for me because I have mental health issues.

'Throughout school I loved art but I felt like I lost a lot of myself in not pursuing it. It felt like something was missing.'

Tahlia has found what she was looking for but it is still challenging.

'One thing I struggle with a lot is independence and going to unfamiliar places and interacting with new people. It was nerve wracking when I started and it is still very difficult for me. Having a new teacher is very daunting for me, especially with small classes and where there's lots of one-on-one interaction.

'But doing the program – apart from what I'm learning about art – has built the fundamental skills I was lacking so it's been very important that way.



Tahlia's found the program very therapeutic and says its done wonders for her mental health.

'When I look at some of the people around me making amazing wonderful creations it really inspires me. I think if that person can do it so can I.

'The entire group is absolutely incredible. It's a really positive and supportive group and the teachers will always check in on you. If you have one of those times where you say "my work's no good, it'll never be any good", the teachers will take time out and help you through it. The teachers are absolutely wonderful.

'Being part of IGNITE has done wonders for my mental health. It's very therapeutic. It's confidence building, and it provides a new support network because the arts community is very tight knit and people will get in touch with you and say "hey here's an opportunity that would be great for you".

'I am often surprised at how nice everyone is. I'm not used to people messaging me out of classes asking how I am, worrying about me or just checking in. It's a really lovely thing because it makes you feel you belong and gives you a sense of community.

'Currently I'm studying a Certificate IV at Canberra Institute of Technology in Visual Arts and from there I'm hoping to get into ANU to study fine arts. Art plays a big part in my life.

'What I've learned about myself from being part of IGNITE is that I'm more capable than I thought I was. It's a good feeling to know I'm better than I thought. It's scary too because it involves setting higher standards for myself. But it's great to know I can make progress and get closer to where I want to be.

'Right now I just want to focus on what will make me a better version of myself.'

<http://www.belconnenartscentre.com.au/programs/ignite/>

What is IGNITE?

IGNITE: Alternative Arts Academy is a series of programs that encourages and facilitates participation in the arts for people with a disability or recovering from mental illness.

What does IGNITE offer?

IGNITE offers a number of streams including:

IGNITE Makers: Weekly workshops in a range of visual arts.

IGNITE Connect: Participants learn and experience a range of art forms across Canberra, including glasswork, singing, printmaking, writing and photography.

IGNITE Social: Social and creative opportunities to learn about the arts through forums and visits to galleries, exhibitions, live theatre, film and music.

IGNITE Room to Move: Dance and movement classes with experienced tutors.

IGNITE 7: An annual exhibition program provides a platform for artists to be promoted and profiled.

Adult Learners' Week 1–8 Sept

This year's #ALW2017 theme is 'Take the leap, rediscover learning', which is designed to promote the idea that there is always something new to learn and that learning can be a positive and joyful experience. The theme is about showing how learning can make us feel more alive, healthier and part of the community.



#ALW2017 is about showing the breadth of opportunities available for adults who want to learn.

It is a grassroots campaign that includes hundreds of community events that promote the benefits of learning and showcase what learning opportunities are available for adults around Australia. The Week is an important way to attract adults who are not engaged in formal or non-formal learning or who have had negative past experiences of education. It is also about engaging adults with low levels of literacy and numeracy or those who lack an understanding of the learning options available to them.

#ALW2017 is a great way for us to communicate 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 media. One of the key messages of #ALW2017 is that learning is a lifelong activity. Lifelong learners are adults who want to continually expand their skills, knowledge and interests. During #ALW2017, we want people to share and discuss how they have re-engaged with learning.

If your organisation offers any form of adult learning such as courses, classes, exhibitions, tours, training, tutoring, discussion groups – then #ALW2017 is an opportunity to celebrate and promote what you do. Some of the venues where ALW events are held include Neighbourhood Houses, libraries, museums, Men's Sheds, local councils and community centres – anywhere adults engage in learning.

Reasons to get involved in #ALW2017

- Promote your organisation, classes and events in your community and local media
- Demonstrate the impact learning has on people's lives and celebrate the achievements of adult learners
- Recruit new learners

- Demonstrate the benefits and positive impact of learning to funding agencies and local politicians
- Build relationships with other organisations in your area

What you can offer

- Provide short courses or taster sessions to give learners an insight into the classes you offer
- Invite speakers to talk about the impact of learning on their lives
- Encourage individual people and groups to have a go at learning something new
- Celebrate the learning of your staff/volunteers
- Announce or launch a new course or new initiative
- Badge open days and events with #ALW2017 branding

Support for your #ALW2017 celebrations

Adult Learning Australia will be co-ordinating the following activities as part of #ALW2017:

- National media and social media campaign
- Toolkits, downloads, tips and promotion of organisations running #ALW2017 events
- National helpline 1300ILEARN for people interested in finding out more about adult learning opportunities
- Adult Learners Week website and social media for information, sharing, promoting and celebrating

<http://www.adultlearnersweek.org>

Event early bird prizes

Register your event on the ALW website before 30 July 2017 and you have the chance to win 1 of 20 \$250 ALW event grants. There are also \$1,000 cash prizes on offer for the best ALW events!

A positive start to parenting

A Queensland program is helping new parents learn the skills needed for what can be a challenging and rewarding job.



Parents learn new skills, make friends and connect with community.

Once a week in Bundaberg, a steady stream of mums and dads pushing prams and carrying kids flows into the offices of Impact Community Services. Some are in their early teens, others in the mid or late 20s. They are here for a class that wasn't offered at school – how to be a parent.

It's a skill that's handed down from one generation to the next, but if you haven't had good parenting yourself it can be hard to know where to begin, Nathan Spruce, Manager of Research and Innovation at Impact says. Positive Start Parenting (PSP) originally began in response to the needs of young single mums in the area but has recently been expanded to include dads and whole families.

'The goal of our program is to help parents develop life and parenting skills as well as provide advice and facilitate access to other community services. We provide a safe and child friendly environment for people to meet and learn in.'

'The group meetings help parents develop a support network, a place where they can build friendships with other people in the program and connect them into community. We use the word capacity and resilience. By capacity we mean giving people the strategies and skills to be able to look after themselves in the future.'

While the kids play parents can meet and talk with support workers who play an advocacy role, helping parents with paperwork, information about training, domestic violence issues, 'the whole caboodle', Nathan says.

'It's an amazing program. We see the differences in people and the differences parenting support can provide. We can see the cloud of worry and burden lift when they realise there are plenty of others going through the same things, that they don't have to go it alone and here's a program that will help them do it.'

Facilitator Jannene Thorn says that in the PSP course the focus is on early intervention and helping people to break cycles of disadvantage. 'Most of them want a better life for themselves and their children.'

Caitlin Laidlaw is 20 and lives with her partner and two daughters – Riley, who is two months, and Lucy, who is two years old.

'I'm not an outgoing kind of person. I'm very shy so the first time I went along was very scary. The first day was an outing to the beach and there were some loud characters on the bus and I was worried that it might be a "bitchy" group. But they were very friendly. We took the kids and let them play on the beach. And I really liked it so I went back.'

'I've made really good friends with two other women in the group and the whole group keep in touch and talk on Facebook.'

'I really like getting out and going to the beach, or to the park with the kids and the group. It's like a play date for my daughter and me, for both of us.'

'I enjoyed school but this is a different kind of learning. As a new mum it's like you're learning on the job. There are no textbooks to help you.'

'It's been really good, it's really helped my parenting. It's taught me ways to cope better with my two year old, especially when she has tantrums. I'm calmer too, getting out of the house and meeting with the group, I don't feel like I'm stuck indoors and I can get out and be a person not just a mum.'

'I would definitely recommend it for other young mums because it gives you time to be yourself, to make friends, to learn things, and it's great for social interaction too.' Jasmine Brown, 23.



Providing a safe and non judgemental space creates a great atmosphere for learning.

Jasmine Brown is 23 years old with a 3 year old daughter and an 8 month old son. For Jasmine, pregnancy disrupted her plans to study at TAFE and she was 'really disappointed' not to be able to continue.

'I didn't really know anyone else my age who was a parent and I was pretty much in the dark so it was great to meet other people, younger and older than me and to be able to communicate without feeling judged. It's such a good feeling to realise that you're not alone.

'To be honest, I do it for me more than for my kids. It's good fun to go and be away from the kids who are playing and being looked after. We do things like scrapbooking where we express how we see ourselves. Last week we had a list of questions to answer about our kids, their personalities, their likes and dislikes. And then we had to answer the same questions about ourselves and it was really difficult. You realise you know your own kids so much better than you know yourself. So it's good to think about who you are and what you want.

'I've changed from being involved in PSP. I have more compassion. I've met mums who experience the same frustration and tiredness that I do but also I've met people whose situation is so much worse than mine. There are mums in the group who have kids with disabilities or whose partners are abusive so it gives me perspective, makes me more sympathetic and understanding.

'I've learned things that have made me a better mum. I learned how every kid has a circle of security, they go out and try things and then they come back to you for comfort. I used to get frustrated because my daughter would cry and her nappy didn't need changing and she didn't want a bottle and I couldn't work out what she wanted. But using the idea of the circle of security I could see all she needed was some reassurance from me before she headed back out again to play with the others. It

opened my eyes to what she wanted and how to give it to her. I'm calmer too.

'If I didn't have the group I really would go crazy.'

'In Bundaberg, the popular perception is that young mums are young women who have drug problems, who have several kids to several dads, who are off the rails and living on Centrelink. So it's really great to have a place where no one feels judged.

www.impact.org.au/our-services/live/parenting-services

Join now

Being a member of ALA is a great way to support lifelong and lifewide learning in Australia and join a thriving national network of adult educators. As a member of ALA, we champion the work you do; develop policies; conduct research and provide professional development to ensure a vibrant, valued and visible adult and community education sector.

To find out more about all the benefits of an ALA membership, go to: <https://ala.asn.au/why-join/>



Exploring possibilities, changing lives

ALA's 54th conference in Hobart featured keynote speakers, presentations, panels as well as networking events and site visits to adult education providers in and around the city.



The Adult Learning Australia Hobart conference **Exploring possibilities, changing lives** attracted registrants from around Australia for a diverse and fascinating two-day program.

This unique event co-hosted with LincTasmania highlighted the diverse range of people and programs involved in adult education around Australia. In a final plenary session, Jenny Macaffer, CEO of ALA called on delegates to show support for the development of a national policy on lifelong learning to coincide with 2018's National Year of Lifelong Learning. For a detailed round up of the conference program, insights, images and reflections on the different sessions, see our issue of Storify here: <http://bit.ly/2rBDVi6>.





Tips for celebrating #ALW2017

From rural libraries to urban Neighbourhood Houses, city museums to country councils, hundreds of organisations across Australia celebrate Adult Learners' Week during the first week of September.



Tips and Trends

Libraries are great spaces to celebrate Adult Learners' Week.

Here are our tips for holding successful #ALW2017 celebrations.

1 Be creative

Host events that express who you are as an organisation and appeal to the people you are trying to reach. Be competitive! We'll be awarding prizes for the best events held across the country.

2 Register and share news of your event

Submit your event details on the ALW website. This promotes your work and helps paint a picture of the variety and range of adult learning activities around Australia. We've added social media sharing buttons on the page too so you can spread the word.

3 Champion your learners

Encourage former learners to come along to your event to show others how learning has changed their lives. Encourage them to share their stories in the ALW learner competition.

4 Plan how to publicise your event

Think about the best way to reach the people you want to come along. This might be through local newspapers or by putting ads in local shopping centre windows as well as through social media. We'll send you a campaign kit with all the branding and promotional material you'll need as well as tips for spreading the word.

5 Invite local journalists

Get in touch with local radio and newspapers. Give them plenty of notice and send a snappy press release alerting them to what's planned.

6 Get active on social media

Follow Adult Learners Week on Facebook to receive and share updates, tips and news of competitions and prizes. Search for the #ALW2017 hashtag to stay up to date with other people involved in celebrating Adult Learners' Week.

7 Invite your MP to your event

Ask them to perform a particular role such as present an award, make a speech about adult learning or launch the week itself. MPs welcome publicity, so let them know what media will be there.

8 Document the event

Take photos or record video to share in print and through social media. Organise who will be the event photographers ahead of time and brief them on the sorts of pictures you'd like them to take.

9 Keep us posted

Share milestones in the lead up, snippets, quotes and highlights during the event as well as your views on how it all went. Tag your social media posts with #ALW2017.

10 Have fun

Adult Learners' Week is a great opportunity for you and the people you work with to celebrate the work you do and the power of adult learning. Once the planning is out of way, relax and enjoy yourself.

www.adultlearnersweek.org

www.facebook.com/adultlearnerswk

Bringing Indigenous knowledge to Indigenous education

Charles Darwin University researcher Tracy Woodroffe is exploring ways that non-Indigenous educators could benefit from understanding Indigenous knowledge systems and approaches to education.



Bringing indigenous knowledge to indigenous education.

Tracy Woodroffe knows what it's like to be an Indigenous teacher and an Indigenous student. She has 20 years experience as a teacher, working in early childhood, primary, secondary, and tertiary settings, as well as in Indigenous education. Currently she's a student too, completing her PhD at Charles Darwin University.

'In my work and particularly in my work with pre-service teachers and improving teacher practice, it struck me there was often this disconnect between non Indigenous teachers and Indigenous learners. I began to wonder about why this might be and it became the starting point of my PhD.'

'Non Indigenous teachers tend to look at their students through a Western frame of reference. Too often Indigenous people are measured in terms of white knowledge and skills and are evaluated against Western versions of success.'

'I came across the work of Indigenous educator and academic Karen Martin who talked about 'Indigenous knowledge' and that really hit home. It seemed to fit with something I had been trying to articulate, something that had puzzled and concerned me. How can we forge a link between Western and Indigenous knowledge as educators? If we could do that it seemed to me we could enhance both teaching and learning.'

Tracy says that too often teacher training fails to recognise the influence of a learner's culture and how it influences preferences in learning, and what is valued about classroom experiences. Her PhD research is a chance to redress what she feels is a glaring problem in Australian education.

Understanding a learner's culture – how they relate, and what they value about knowledge and education – is essential if teachers want students to get the most out of the learning experience.

'Too often Indigenous people are referred to in terms of deficits. Seeing Indigenous people in a deficit light doesn't help anyone.'

Tracy has adopted Martin's definitions as a theoretical framework to highlight the links between Western and Indigenous values when it comes to knowledge and learning.

Tracy hopes that building bridges between teachers' and Indigenous learners' knowledge will transform both teaching and learning.

She says although educational expectations of teachers and students can be very different, it is the similarities between them that are a fruitful path for improving educational outcomes. 'My PhD research is starting to show that non-Indigenous pre-service teachers want to make a connection with Indigenous students, but in reality it can be quite difficult,' she said.

Tracy is teasing out the contrasts and the similarities between Western and Indigenous ways of being, ways of knowing and ways of doing. 'What I'm hoping to do is improve teacher training by highlighting the limitations of the Western viewpoint, and the potential of a more inclusive educational approach.'

She believes that making changes so teachers value and understand Indigenous approaches, knowledge, and culture will improve Indigenous students' experience of education and learning.

'I'm aiming to engage in research that can be used across Australia. The key is developing Indigenous pride in and respect for the importance of our own ideas and Indigenous knowledge.'

Tracy's excited to be presenting her research at the world's largest Indigenous education conference, the World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education in Canada in July.

'It is exciting for me as an Indigenous person to have this opportunity to connect and share ideas with other Indigenous people from around the world,' Tracy says. 'My abstract was picked up and accepted really quickly, which indicates that my research is addressing a real gap. What's been missing in educational research is the Indigenous voice.'

ACE update

In **South Australia**, Community Centres SA's 'Growing Communities' conference, which will be held from October 25–27, focusses on bringing about positive social and economic change in an era of accelerating economic and environmental pressures and widening inequity. Updates and information is available at:

<https://www.communitycentressa.asn.au/capacitybuilding/conference/conference-2017>

In **Queensland**, the Queensland Families and Communities Association (QFCA) a state-wide network of organisations involved in community development and service delivery including Community Centres, Neighbourhood Centres and Family Support Services is soon to launch a new website. Geoff Roberson, Executive Officer of QFCA says the website will improve networking between members, and also make it easier for the public to find Neighbourhood Centres in their locality that run education programs.

www.qfca.org.au

In **Western Australia**, peak body LinkWest is finalising plans for its 2017 conference: Belonging, which is to be held in Perth 19–21 September 2017. The conference theme explores and celebrates the role of Neighbourhood and Community Resource Centres (CRCs) in providing a safe place for people to gather, connect, learn, grow and belong. The conference includes the Linkwest Awesomeness Awards 2017, which recognise the outstanding contribution of those working on the ground in Neighbourhood and Community Resource Centres across WA.

Linkwest also recently ran a series of **Measuring Your Success** workshops to help CRCs manage the transition in reporting requirements from an outputs to an outcomes focus.

<http://www.linkwest.asn.au>



NHV 2017 conference attracted record numbers

Neighbourhood Houses **Victoria** (NHVic) is pleased to promote two new research reports. 'Hobson's Bay Community Centres Research Project Report' highlights the achievements and challenges facing centres in this area of Melbourne's west. 'The Go Into Bat For Me' reports on Morwell Neighbourhood House and its role in the community's recovery from the Hazelwood mine fire. May was a busy month for NHVic with celebrations of Neighbourhood House Week across the state and a record 250 people representing 147 Houses attending NHVic's 2017 conference in Creswick.

<https://www.nhvic.org.au/>

In **Tasmania**, Neighbourhood Houses Tasmania has partnered with the Alcohol, Tobacco & Other Drugs Council (ATDC) on the **Connecting people with AOD (Alcohol and Other Drugs) Support through Neighbourhood Houses** project. Funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services, it aims to strengthen local communities and help Neighbourhood Houses to improve support for people presenting with alcohol, tobacco and other drug related issues.

<http://nht.org.au/projects/connecting-people-with-support-through-neighbourhood-houses/>

National news

Here at Adult Learning Australia after recent board elections we said farewell and big thankyou to retiring board members Belinda Dolan and Malcolm Lobban and welcomed new members Ros Bauer (NT) and Sue Howard (Tas). More about our board at <https://ala.asn.au/about-us/ala-board/>

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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