



# QUEST

ISSUE 3 2017

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# Reconnecting with education

For young people who hated school, the idea of returning to education or training can be overwhelming. Youth programs that offer early school leavers help in returning to learning are having a big impact in Melbourne's west.

On Monday mornings young people at Wyndham Community and Education Centre (WCEC) in Melbourne's west are crowded around cooking toast and pouring cereal, enjoying the free healthy breakfast donated by the local Sikh community. On Tuesday afternoons, a youth lawyer is on hand to give advice and help them navigate and interact with the legal system. On Wednesdays and Fridays, NOSH mobile food service arrives to hand out free nutritious lunches along with advice on staying healthy.

The Centre offers a range of Youth Services programs to help young people to re-engage with work and education and these visiting youth services form part of a web of support to help them stay on track.

'At school I was always nervous about asking for help. Now I think, "I don't know everything and it's OK to ask questions." Asking for help and asking questions is how you learn.'

The 'Reconnect' program at the Centre is a one-on-one service that supports early school leavers in overcoming obstacles on the path to study, training or work.

It's a path **Hayden Giddings**, 16, has taken. He left school at the beginning of Year 10 hoping to get a job.

'School was too hard. I couldn't do it. They just wrote things up on the board and I couldn't follow. I didn't do my homework and I didn't go very much.'

When he did go back he realised he had just gotten further and further behind. 'I dropped out and thought I might get a job.'

But after four months of unemployment, a local youth agency referred him to Reconnect. Once enrolled, he attended WCEC one day a week for 10 weeks to work on his anger management skills and self esteem. 'I learned about cooking, budgeting, shopping, things I didn't know how to do before. The anger management really helped. Now I'm more calm and I try not to get angry and to take a breath and relax.'

After the support of Reconnect, Hayden felt ready to take the next step and enrolled in the foundation year of the

(Story continues on p. 3)

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lifewide learning  
for all Australians*

# Message from the CEO



Australia's adult and community education sector is a gateway to lifelong learning which can enhance our understanding of the world around us, provide us with more and better opportunities and improve our quality of life.

Spring is here, a time of new beginnings and a perfect time to celebrate Adult Learners' Week with its inspiring message to 'Take the leap, rediscover learning'. Our national festival promotes the joys of learning and discovering and the opportunities for sharing and experiencing personal enrichment, social connection and building life skills.

A highlight of Adult Learners' Week is the official launch which this year was held in Parliament House Theatre, Canberra. We got off to an inspiring start, celebrating with the launch of the documentary, 'In My Own Words' a film which highlights the successful Literacy for Life Foundation program operating in the Aboriginal community of Brewarrina in New South Wales.

More than 100 people attended, with the Hon. Karen Andrews MP Assistant Minister for Vocational Education and Skills officially launching the week. Other parliamentarians were present as were officers from the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet and Department of Education. I also met His Excellency, Mr Jose Gelago from Cuba, the country that initiated the 'Yes I Can!' literacy program, plus many more committed community members who shared in our celebration.

The Pop Up Choir Canberra provided the perfect closing event for the night, their sweet voices surprising everyone as choir members stood up from their seats and sang; learning to sing together in harmony can be uplifting and powerful, but when it happens in Parliament House – it is a miracle!

Along with the ALA President, I also took the opportunity to meet with department officials and relevant political advisors whilst in Canberra before and after the launch. We encouraged increased government recognition of the role of adult and community education in supporting and strengthening our communities and emphasised the need for a National Lifelong Learning policy.

**With over 500 hundred events taking place around the country Adult Learners' Week highlighted just how important the learning that takes place outside of formal institutions is to learners and communities. You just have to browse the hundreds of events listed on our Adult Learners' Week website to appreciate just how vibrant, creative and committed our adult and community education sector is.**

In this edition of Quest, you will find some fine examples of lives transformed by participation in adult and community education. For people with negative experiences of school re-engaging with learning takes courage. Program providers need courage and creativity too. Working with disengaged learners demands innovative approaches that offer a positive experience of education. All adults with barriers to learning must be given the opportunity to develop the skills they need to build their confidence and contribute to our diverse and changing society. This is the message we want to take forward; that access to education and lifelong learning is a human right for all people, everywhere.

Jenny Macaffer

CEO



Daniella Podesta has come out of her shell and is now quietly confident.

(story continued from p. 1)

Centre's Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) program. VCAL is an alternative option to VCE with a 'hands on' learning focus and this year over 120 students have enrolled. VCAL students can put together a study program that suits their needs, with many students interested in going on to vocational education, apprenticeships or work.

'When I started I was nervous that I'd be judged but I've made good friends. It's beautiful here, it's so much better. Teachers explain, they help, there's less pressure and it's a smaller environment. At my old school I liked to muck around. I used to think "I am dumb". Now I do my work, focus and listen to my teachers. And I'm getting smarter and thinking about the future now. I wasn't before. I really want to do something like engineering or carpentry. At school in woodwork I was always up the front, coming first. I loved it. So I want to pass Year 10 and get an apprenticeship. If I don't then I'll come back here next year and do Year 11.'

Even though classes don't start till 9 am, Hayden gets to school most days before 8 o'clock. After classes are over, he spends the rest of the day at the Centre catching up on work.

'My favourite thing has been reconnecting with maths. At school I didn't know or care about it. Now I know I need it for things like measurements and I've got a different attitude. I really enjoy work-related skills but I find literacy is still a struggle. But now I get all my work done. I take it home and finish it there.'

'Here it's a lot less stressful, the teachers have more time to fully explain things to me. They really care and are always available.'

Hayden notices other differences in himself. 'Before I never bothered about cleaning up at home but now I've got more respect, I cook and I clean. I come here every day and I'm punctual. I'm a different person.'

'I used to be a bit of a smart arse to teachers and now I'm much more respectful. I've learned that the way you treat others is the way they treat you, so they respect me back.'

His advice for other young people wanting to leave school early? 'Don't drop out. School is important for life. You have to learn about stuff and you can't just learn it off the Internet. School is important because it makes a difference to your future.'

**Daniella Podesta** was a quiet and under-confident 15 year old Year 9 student at a large local secondary college. School was a struggle. She found it hard to keep up with the work and dreaded each new assignment.

'Even if I had a week to do it in I would get really stressed because I wanted to do it right but the teachers always seemed too busy to give me any extra help. Sometimes I felt they didn't care.'

'I used to hate school. I used to think "I'm going to do nothing with my life".'

She heard about the VCAL program at Wyndham from a couple of friends who'd done it and they said it was great. 'I was really struggling. I went home and said to Mum, "I can't do it anymore. If I can't move to the VCAL program I want to drop out".'

Daniella was shy at first but now she has blossomed. She enjoys the relaxed atmosphere, the small class sizes and the extra attention from teachers.



Teresa Vizintin VCAL & Youth Manager at WCEC (centre) says getting to know students well and being attuned to their needs is vital.

'Everyone helps each other. Not just the teachers but the other students in Foundation, Intermediate and Seniors, we all mix together and we pool ideas.'

'School just meant doing the work to me before. Now learning is fun, there's lots of laughing and it's helped me a lot. Once you relax you can learn more. I'm enjoying school now. I used to think I was dumb as, but now I think I can do whatever I try to do. Now I daydream about the future.'

Daniella is quietly confident that she'll pass her Year 12 and the future's looking bright.

'Now I feel like I've got so many more options.'

Daniella laughs. 'Now the only time I get in trouble is for talking too much. But that's shows I've got good communication skills doesn't it?'

**Teresa Vizintin** VCAL & Youth Manager at WCEC says 'People often assume that our VCAL students are not in mainstream school because they've been naughty or have been expelled. But many are kids who have had their school attendance interrupted by frequent family moves or homelessness or because they are carers with very little support or they have had medical or mental health issues themselves. Some kids find mainstream schools with their uniforms, bells and overall formality difficult to manage. So we have a real mix of advantaged and disadvantaged students who've chosen to be here and want to be here.'

'I've got four children of my own and they're always telling other people mum's got 120 kids. We're like family here. I'm always telling people I have the best job in the world,' Teresa Vizintin, VCAL & Youth Manager, WCEC.

'What we do really well is understand what each young person cares about and we actively assist them to reach their goals. We work closely with individual students on attendance, educational programs, progress and welfare and we can respond quickly and put supports into place for students who need it.'

'We all get to know each other very well. The staff and the students are very respectful towards one another. We spend time interacting with our young people, even when we're on yard duty.'

'One of our former students, who was homeless when he first came here, is now in his final year of a carpentry apprenticeship and was recently given an apprentice of the year award. He comes back and talks to our students saying if it wasn't for this course he'd be in jail. Instead he's working and a positive contributing community member,' Teresa says.

'We're very proud of our kids' success. We say that every young person starting here is offered a fresh start – a new journey. At times the kids find this difficult to believe because of their past experiences, but they quickly learn that being here at Wyndham CEC is a team effort. Here they have adults to guide them, it's a whole team approach'.

Top down commitment is the key, Teresa says. 'I believe that the success of the programs here is due to the support of our CEO who is very passionate about the work we do with young people.'

'We are so proud of our students. Students like Hayden and Daniella arrived feeling embarrassed and scared and not saying a word. From the staff point of view that's our reward, to see this wonderful growth and positive change in our students, to see them coming to believe in themselves and embrace their education with an appreciation of lifelong learning.'

# Reading Write Now

Since it started 40 years ago Read Write Now volunteers have assisted around 35,000 adult West Australians who have struggled with literacy.



Samuel and Philippa meet each week in the Read Write Now office at the State Library.

**On Thursday evenings after a 10-hour day at work, 34 year old boilermaker Samuel Timney doesn't knock off and go home to his wife and three children. Instead he travels into the city to the meet his tutor Philippa Clark for their Read Write Now session. They've been meeting each week for almost a year.**

When he saw the ad on TV with a phone number for help with reading and writing, Samuel realised it was time to make the call. He'd noticed how the job market was changing and its demands for higher levels of literacy put him at risk of unemployment.

'I was finding it harder to get work. I was dealing with agencies and there was always 50 health and safety forms to fill out before you could swing a hammer.'

But becoming a dad was the clincher. 'The biggest thing was having kids. I couldn't read to the kids. I could read *Where's Spot?* because I could pretty much guess the story from the pictures. Also since having kids I realised I couldn't just let it slide. I couldn't just sit back and let life cruise by. Knowing I'm a provider now too I realised I had to push myself. In the past I've had a "she'll be right" attitude but I've always wanted more. I'd love to be an engineer or a marine architect. I want to do more with my life.'

That doesn't mean taking the first steps towards getting help was easy. 'When I met Philippa I had kind of already given up because I've tried doing something about my reading and failed so many times before. So I was fighting myself to go again.'

His bad experiences of school didn't help. 'I grew up in rural New Zealand and I struggled at school. They didn't seem to know about dyslexia back then. I was put in a class with kids who were deaf or who had learning difficulties. I had a couple of teachers who tried to help but it didn't make much

difference. In my last year at school, I had a graphic design teacher who really helped and I ended up doing stuff that was 2 and 3 years above my level, because I can think in 3 dimensional pictures it was quite easy for me. But when it came to the test my teacher organised a reader and writer to help me but when I got the exam there was no one there to help me and the test supervisors seemed to think I was being lazy or stupid.

'I left school when I turned 15 and worked in boat yards. I was glad to get out of school but at the same time I didn't know how I was going to function or survive in the world.'

Being upfront about his problem with reading and writing hasn't guaranteed Samuel any assistance either. 'One time I was offered the opportunity to go up north for BHP. I had to go to health and safety training and I got my supervisor to ring ahead and let them know I would need help. But when I got there I was handed a five hour lesson plan and was told that no one would help. I'm upfront, I communicate and let people know what I need but they still can be dicks about it. I get angry about it at times.

'People often assume you're stupid if you can't read or you're lazy or there's something wrong with you. Some people give me a bit of attitude for example if I go to the physio and ask for help they act like "why should I help you with the form?". A lot of people have been good about it too, but generally it's really difficult. I still feel ashamed and it can be quite embarrassing sometimes.'

'Philippa sets me homework goals and if I don't meet them I feel guilty and I feel like I'm letting her down. Philippa puts in so much energy, she gives her time, she drives into the city and pays for parking and I feel I can't give up because I have to honour that.'



Samuel dreams of swapping welding for marine architecture.

He's conscious of how his problems with literacy have shaped his life. 'It's really limited me. You don't look for opportunities. You stay away even from small things, you just don't bother. Your world shrinks as you get older, it gets smaller and you get more stuck.'

Samuel's put in extra effort in his current job to overcome his disadvantage. 'The place where I work now I've worked really hard and I've been made leading hand. I've got high standards, which is why I got offered a leading hand role because I take a lot of pride in what I do. I can't afford to slack off and I have to work much harder to overcome my disadvantage. I'm looking into new technology at the moment to help me along, tools like a special pen that reads text to help me spell what I want to write down on the timesheet.'

'For me as an adult and dad, it's a fear thing. If I don't do something about it now how will I manage in the future? Fifty years ago you could get a trade and not need reading and you'd be fine. That's how I started out and it never was an issue. But now I see you get funnelled into a spot that's hard to get out of. I can always find a job welding for \$25 an hour but to get out of that you have to fight your way out. Some of the guys who have half the drive that I have do a lot better.'

'Philippa is helping me to attack reading from a different angle. I've always tried to rote learn but she's getting me into phonics and understanding different rules and she uses material written for adults so I'm not sitting there trying to read stuff written for kids – so that's good.'

**'If you're a dreamer like me it's soul destroying to have a dream that you never see yourself achieving. Then again, it seems a bit more possible than it did a couple of years ago.'**

'I see some hope in using new technology. I went to see a lady who will teach me how to use an iPad, so I can push a button and it will bring up what I want to watch on YouTube so I can watch things like Pink Floyd. That's quite freeing, being able to find and watch things you really like. Hope brings joy and then I feel life's not so bad.'

But it's a struggle not to feel disheartened. 'Sometimes I feel down about it too. I think one option would be for me to go back to New Zealand to live and do a job in the bush and never have to face reading again in my life. Or I can stay in Perth and fight a bit harder.'

'Sometimes I feel like I'm not improving fast enough and it's hard work. Giving up feels easy sometimes. I'll learn a new word and then a week later I've forgotten it. It's like I'm trying to retrain my brain. I do a 10 hour work day then travel into the city to meet Philippa for another two hours and I'm really tired by the end of our session. It's so tempting to just go home and watch TV.'

'But one of the things I've found out from working with Philippa is that I'm very hard on myself. I'd love to do marine architecture but it's a massive goal, a four year degree so I have to take small steps.'

### **Philippa Clark**

Philippa has been a Read Write Now (RWN) tutor for almost 3 years. She's worked as a primary school teacher and later trained at Dyslexia SPELD in working with children with dyslexia and other literacy learning difficulties.

'I saw 8–10 students a week after school hours. They were aged over 7, mainly boys. It was very rewarding but at that age they would much rather be out kicking a footy instead of inside working on their reading. It took a lot of energy and creativity. The thought of working with adults who were self motivated and who needed a leg up really appealed to



Samuel reads to his kids now.

me. A friend suggested Read Write Now and I've been really pleased with it.

'The tutor training was very hands on and practical, with lots of role-playing and an emphasis on how every student is different. After the training, I found the RWN team very supportive. They always have time for me and are happy to sit and talk over problems and suggest ideas. I feel very valued.

'While the theory of dyslexia is very similar the way of working with adults is obviously very different. I use a multisensory approach. So for teaching the alphabet, for example, I use plastic letters, games to reinforce sounds and memory and I use cards, pictures and colours. I sometimes use ball throwing to associate and connect a concept through rhythm and play with a tactile object.

'Understanding your student is the most important thing, and seeing what works best for them. My basic pattern is to teach, back it up, reinforce it and apply it.

'I meet with Samuel once a week for up to two hours. By the end of a long day he's tired and it's hard to concentrate. I always allow time for us to settle in, have a chat and relax.

'Like a lot of people with reading problems Samuel was tired of pretending. It's so common for people to feel ashamed, and it is exhausting thinking up strategies for how to cope and how to hide it.

'He's very positive and determined. When I met him his attitude was "Right I'm going to do something about this." He's very open with his boss and good at communicating his needs. He tells his boss "Please don't give me forms to fill in or if you do give me more time to get them done". Because he's very confident he expresses his difficulties well. He's very intelligent and very good at maths.

'It's very rewarding to work with someone like Samuel. I really admire his resilience, and his determination to learn. When you understand how difficult life is for someone who has trouble reading and writing and how they've coped, it's very humbling.

'But I know he gets frustrated because he wants to move fast. I try to set him up for success by setting him small goals. It's easy for people to think "This is so hard and I don't seem to be getting anywhere" so you've got to reel them back in and say "Hang on, look what you just did!" You have to help people notice the progress they're making.

'Samuel's made big gains. Before he couldn't recite the complete alphabet and couldn't recognise some sounds and didn't know what order letters came in. He didn't know the order of the months of the year, so he wasn't sure of his children's birthdays. Now he's reading more fluently, he's recognising syllables, breaking words down into small chunks instead of just guessing them. I've seen really significant improvements in his reading. So for me it's just a delightful experience.'

#### About Read Write Now

Read Write Now (RWN) is celebrating four decades of literacy tutoring this year. Funded by WA's Department of Training and Workforce Development RWN has over 500 volunteer tutors and receives around 20 calls a week from adults seeking help with their literacy.

<http://www.read-write-now.org/>

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'It's very humbling. I think I learn as much from my adult students as they do from me.'

# Adult Learners' Week a hit

This year hundreds of organisations around the country embraced the theme of Adult Learners' Week to 'Take the leap, rediscover learning'.



In the first week of September over 500 events around Australia celebrated the diverse and myriad ways adults are involved in learning in their communities.

Our national festival celebrating the variety and impact of adult learning was celebrated across the country in community centres, libraries, neighbourhood houses, TAFEs, Men's Sheds and more.

With so many organisations celebrating with gusto it was a difficult task choosing prizes for the best Adult Learners' Week events. Awards went to Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre (VIC), Coromandel Community Centre (SA), Macquarie Community College (NSW), Town of Victoria Park Library (WA), Alice Springs Public Library (NT) and City of Devonport Brass Band (TAS).

Our competition for learners invited people to share their stories of rediscovering learning and it was terrific to see such a range of inspiring entries. Prizes went to Kathleen Webber, Abdulatif Omar, Sarah Jane Love and Greenhills Neighbourhood House. Congratulations to everyone involved!







# Tips for being a lifelong learner at work

Professional development often goes to the bottom of the list when you're busy at work. But with ever-changing jobs and increasing demands professional development is more important than ever.



Here are our tips for staying up to date with skills for work.

### 1 Keep your eyes open

Reading is a great way to keep up to date, whether it's browsing professional journals, delving into books, researching papers and articles or following links online – it will keep you on top of your game.

### 2 Find your tribe

Social media makes it so much easier to connect with like-minded people around the world to share insights and recommendations. Do some research to find where your tribe gathers and the best way to connect and take part in professional development activities. Make time for mentoring.

### 3 Find a mentor

Find a mentor and take some tips from someone you'd love to learn from who can give you guidance on where you want to go and how to get there. Or take on the role of mentor yourself and offer to coach someone else. Either way you'll learn a lot.

### 4 Keep your calendar handy

Make a list of your professional development goals. This makes it easier to plan ahead and choose learning activities that match your needs. As well as face to face programs and conferences, webinars and online training make it easier than ever to participate in learning at work or at home.

### 5 Gather and share

Share data and insights about the work you do and publish it as a blog or an article. Sharing your expertise this way builds your reputation and your confidence as well as contributing to the status of work in your field.

### 6 Put your hand up

Volunteering is a great way to extend your skills and get some practical experience. Try out a new role through hands-on participation.

### 7 Pass it on

Train others, give presentations or speak at conferences. You'll not only improve your public speaking skills, you'll meet new people and make new connections.

### 8 Stretch yourself

Get out of your comfort zone. Try learning about something you usually avoid, whether it's chairing a committee, mastering financial jargon or writing a submission. Taking on a tough topic gives you a chance to extend yourself and take a different perspective.

### 9 Follow your interests

Include some fun and creativity in your professional development plan. Follow what makes you curious and interested. You never know where it might lead.

### 10 Take a break

Organise a secondment, an internship or shadow someone whose work you admire. Learn on the job by trying something new.

Find a mentor and take some tips from someone you'd love to learn from who can give you guidance on where you want to go and how to get there.

# Adult and community education awards



It's awards season with celebrations of the outstanding efforts of adult learners and educators around the country.

In **Victoria** The Minister for Training and Skills, the Hon Gayle Tierney MP and the Deputy Chair of the ACFE Board, Ron Wilson announced the winners of the 2017 Victorian Learn Local Awards at a celebration of the sector at the Malvern Town Hall on Thursday 31 August 2017. Overcoming disadvantage and transforming lives through education were the key themes celebrated at this year's Awards. The five awards went to:



**Christie Sinclair**, who studied at Banksia Gardens Community Services won the Ro Allen Award which recognises excellence in pre-accredited learning.

**Lachlan McKenzie**, Hospitality teacher at Jesuit Community College won the Outstanding Practitioner Award. Lachlan has trained over 600 people in the College's pre-accredited barista courses.



**Try a Trade, Diversitat** won Outstanding Pathways Program for giving disengaged young people hands-on experience and a taste of different trades.

Linking Learning to the Land, **Paynesville Neighbourhood Centre** won the award for Excellence in Creating Local Solutions for helping build pathways from unemployment to jobs on farms in East Gippsland.

**Paw Po Products Community Enterprise**, Nhill Learning Centre won the AMES Diversity Innovation Award for its work with refugees making and selling handcrafted products in the Wimmera.

This year, two acknowledgement categories – the Learn Local Legend and Learn Local Volunteer Champion were also awarded. Details of award winners <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/awards/Pages/learnlocal.aspx>



# ACE awards

In **South Australia** Adult Learners' Week kicked off with the 2017 Adult Learners' Week Awards. Held on 24 August, the awards recognise outstanding individual achievement and acknowledge the importance of the adult community education sector.

Adelaide woman **Tania McHendrie** is the 2017 South Australian Adult Learner of the Year.

Tania — now employed at the University of South Australia — credits Adult Community Education as the boost she needed to re-engage with learning and improve her opportunities.

**Kaitlyn Noll** the only Aboriginal woman studying the Engineering and Fabrication trade at the Olympic Dam mine in Roxby Downs won Aboriginal Learner of the Year.

**Christine Willersdorf** won Adult Educator/Mentor of the Year for her work helping long-term unemployed people in the Murraylands to turn their lives around.

**The Murraylands Food Alliance Jobs 4 Murraylands project** won Adult Learning Program of the Year — sponsored by Adult Learning Australia — for addressing the needs of local industry, connecting participants to job opportunities and supporting them to improve confidence, self-esteem and motivation.

The **Oodnadatta Social Enterprise Project** won Adult Learning Community of the Year for providing Aboriginal women with the opportunity to learn how to set up and manage their own hand-made arts and craft enterprise.

In **New South Wales**, Community Colleges Australia (CCA) announced **Jolie Kaja** a graduate of Coffs Coast Community College winner of the first 'Community Education Student of the Year' award at CCA's Annual Conference. A refugee and single mother of four, since she arrived in Australia Jolie has learned English, completed vocational training and now works in aged care.

See the rest of the awards finalists here <https://cca.edu.au/what-we-do/2017-annual-conference/#student-award>

# 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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Adult Learners Week Award winners



ALW Award winner Tania McHendrie

Adult Learning Program of the Year winners Murraylands Food Alliance with Assistant Minister to the Premier, Katrine Hildyard, MP (centre).



ACE Awards night



CCA winner Jolie Kaja



*Lifelong and  
lifewide learning  
for all Australians*