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Editorial

Sally Thompson – CEO

Welcome to the latest edition of Quest. In this edition, we include an introduction to the new Minister for Higher Education and Skills in the newly formed Baileu government in Victoria, Peter Hall. It's always good to have education ministers who are themselves educators. Like Peter Collier, the WA Minister for Training and Workforce Education who featured in Issue 3 of Quest last year, Peter Hall is a former secondary teacher, and brings this perspective to the task of leading Victoria's adult education system.

Victoria is often thought of as the national leader in adult and community education, with a strong geographic footprint of neighbourhood houses, community learning centres, continuing education centres and community colleges, all operating under the banner of ACE, spread through most regional, rural and metropolitan communities. In addition, the TAFE system in Victoria is decentralised, highly flexible and able to work with the community based ACE sector to build partnerships and pathways for learners, particularly in remote locations. Of course, being a Victorian, and a member of the Victorian ACFE Board, I may be slightly biased!



On the 18th of April, I look forward to moving beyond my Victorian perspective and meeting with a range of educators and other stakeholders in Tasmania for the Men's Learning and Wellbeing forum that we are delivering in conjunction with the University of Ballarat Centre for Addressing Disadvantage in Education & Health Research Group and a range of community partners at the Rosny LINC. In recent times the Tasmanian government have made concerted efforts to provide a range of programs to improve the literacy and numeracy levels of Tasmanian adults. The forum aims to bring together educators and those working in the health and community services fields around the topic of improving men's wellbeing through engagement in learning.

Back in Victoria, the 51st Annual ALA conference is being held in Melbourne in September around the theme of "celebrating adult learning spaces". (It really was Victoria's turn!) Our hosts, the CAE are providing us with access to their "home" in the heart of Melbourne's CBD and have an exciting program that will appeal to adult educators across the country. Our International speakers include Peter Lavendar, from the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education on the UK and Dr Jo Lake, CEO of ACE Aotearoa and our national speakers include Indigenous educators Tony Dreise from Queensland, and Kathryn Gilbey from the Northern Territory as well as Dr Elaine Butler, the convenor of Women in Adult and Vocational Education. (All non-Victorians!)

Later this month, ALA is very pleased to be hosting our colleagues from throughout the region as the Asia South Pacific Association for Adult Basic Education meet in both Melbourne and Ballarat. Throughout the stay, ALA delegates and stakeholders will meet with their ASPBAE counterparts to consider the skills that are required to prepare learners for global citizenship and ways that we can work cooperatively to forward that agenda.

Finally, ALA has been busy on the policy front contributing to the Skills Australia review of the Vocational Education and Training System and also appearing before the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Infrastructure and Communication Inquiry into the Role and Potential of the NBN. We were also able to develop and distribute our policy platform in the lead up to the NSW state election. I encourage you to visit the Policy and Representation page of our website to view our recent activity and have your say on ALA's advocacy and policy work.

In Brief

2011 Adult Learning Conference



The 51st Annual ALA Conference will be hosted by the CAE, Melbourne on Monday 26th and Tuesday 27th of September. The conference theme is Celebrating Adult Learning Spaces and will be held in and around the laneways of Melbourne, where the CAE has its home. The conference will explore:

- Adult Learning in Partnerships
- Adult Learning in Workplaces
- ACE in every State and Territory and
- Learning Communities

To register online now and receive an early-bird member's discount, [click here](#).

Name Change for Learning Centre Link

As of 1st January 2011, *Learning Centre Link* officially became *Linkwest*. They are in the process of changing all their documents and their new logo will be launched soon. Linkwest is the peak association for community, learning and neighbourhood centres in Western Australia.

NSW Election results

The new NSW State Minister for Education is Adrian Piccoli. Mr Piccoli has been Member for Murrumbidgee and a Member of the NSW Legislative Assembly for 12 years and deputy leader of the National Party since 2008. He is a former solicitor and irrigation rice farmer. Adult Learning Australia looks forward to interviewing him about his Adult and Community Education policies very soon.





The theme for Global Action Week 2011 is Women's and Girl's Education. In 2011, the Global Campaign for Education is calling upon all governments to invest and commit to equity by ensuring that women and girls, along with men and boys, have an equal chance at education.

Each year, since 2002, millions of people across the world take part in activities during the Global Campaign for Education's 'Global Action Week' to call on leaders to take action on the UN Millenium Development Goal of achieving Education for every man, woman and child by 2015. With just 4 years left and the world struggling with natural disasters, financial and food crises, Global Action Week 2011 is more important than ever to ensure that world leaders honour their promises to provide Education for All.

This year's theme is Women's and Girls' Education – an issue that still sees one woman in four in the world unable to read or write. Coalitions from across the world will be calling on world leaders to ensure female education is prioritised and acted upon.

To get involved, register with the [Australian Coalition for Education and Development](#) and receive your Global Action Week resource pack, ready to take part between the 2nd and 8th of May 2011.

For further information, check out [The Australian Coalition for Education and Development](#) and [Global Action Week](#).

ACAL Conference 2011



The Australian Council for Adult Literacy (ACAL) Conference will be held on the 27th -28th September 2011 in Melbourne. It will provide an opportunity to articulate, demonstrate and celebrate the vitality of the Literacy, Language and Numeracy field in Australia.

The conference title is *Literacy on the Map: Common Visions, Different Paths*. It signals the potential for exploring the many ways in which learning is achieved.

A [call for presentations](#) has been issued inviting teachers, researchers, program managers and policy analysts working in the field of adult literacy and numeracy to express an interest in presenting a paper, delivering a workshop session or forming part of a panel discussion for the Conference.

For further information, go to the [ACAL Conference website](#).

ePortfolios Australia Conference in Perth



Following on from the success of [ePortfolios Australia Conference 2010](#), the ePortfolios Australia Conference 2011 will bring together national and international educators and thought leaders to showcase the ways e-portfolio practice is making a difference to adult education in Australia. The Conference will be held at Curtin University in Perth on the 17 – 18 October 2011.

This major national tertiary education event will demonstrate the use of e-portfolios to support and engage [adult learning](#) from the:

- [vocational education and training \(VET\)](#) sector
- [higher education \(HE\)](#) sector, and
- [adult and community education \(ACE\)](#) sector

This year's keynote speaker is co-founder of the [Inter/National Coalition for Electronic Portfolio Research](#), [Kathy Yancey](#), Professor of English at Florida State University. Her work has had a major influence on e-portfolio theory and practice. Other information about plenary speakers will be available shortly. For further information, please visit the [website](#).

New Communications Officer for ALA

Adult Learning Australia has recently employed Ilka Tampke to produce Quest magazine help Sally keep the website brimming with interesting information for members.

Ilka would love to hear from you if you have any feedback or comments on this edition of Quest, or if you would like to make suggestions for future issues or articles. Members' letters and contributions are warmly welcome and will be considered for publication in the next Quest. Contact Ilka at i.tampke@ala.asn.au.

Film Giveaway from Icon Movies

Icon movies, in association with Adult Learning Australia are offering ALA members the chance to win free passes to Oranges and Sunshine. The first five people to email Adult Learning Australia at info@ala.asn.au will receive a free double pass.

From the Academy Award winning producers of *The King's Speech*, *Oranges and Sunshine* tells another incredible true story, this time of Margaret Humphreys, a social worker from the UK, who uncovered one of the most significant social scandals in recent times: the organised deportation of children in care from the United Kingdom to Australia.

Almost single-handedly, and against overwhelming odds and with little regard for her own well-being, Margaret reunited thousands of families, brought authorities to account and worldwide attention to an extraordinary miscarriage of justice. Only at the movies from June 9. For further information about the film, go to www.iconmovies.com.au.

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Sally spoke about the importance of human interaction within Broadband for Seniors program: "People really valued accessing the technology, but they really valued accessing the technology in the company of others, in the company of more advanced users."

She highlighted a program for Indigenous young people in Alice Springs where there had been significant investment in learning tools for online use, but she pointed out that "people really need to be supported to access those things."

High speed internet alone won't provide the learning and social engagement offered by programs such as these. Just as a hammer can be used to either build a cathedral or rob a bank, so too high speed internet has the potential to engage Indigenous young people in Alice Springs with literacy activities and older men in Corryong with GPS mapping software or it can be used to fill the days of these same groups of people with faster access to meaningless tasks and shallow relationships. From ALA Submission to NBN Inquiry

Bandwidth

The issue of bandwidth was a key discussion point at the hearing. Sally pointed out that “the stronger the bandwidth, the closer the communication starts to replicate a face-to face experience,” and that one of the strange ironies of the internet was that “the simpler the tool, the more bandwidth it seems to require.”

The problem with variable or patchy bandwidth, is that educators have to pitch their training at the weakest bandwidth in order to be inclusive, and that results in a ‘lowest common denominator’ approach, where people are dramatically under-utilising the capability of their e-learning tools. Sally offered the Elluminate, webinar technology, utilised as part of the Broadband for Seniors project, as an example. “If rural people did not come to those sessions you would be able to have multiple video streaming and you would be able to have a whiteboard where everyone scribbled on the white board at once. We use about 10 percent of the potential of that tool.”

Cost

The issue of cost drove many of the Committee’s questions, particularly in relation to affordability for rural and remote communities.

Sally agreed that cost of services is definitely a big factor in access and equity, but in many remote communities, there is currently no service to pay for.

Sally was asked whether Adult Learning Australia would be concerned if it turned out that the NBN led to an increase in the typical cost of broadband connections. In her response, Sally highlighted the need for cheap or free access points in community centres or libraries, where disadvantaged community groups could access support to use services. This would be necessary even if broadband to homes were reasonably priced.

Speed

When the conversation turned technical, Sally declared herself out of the game, but she emphasized that Adult Learning Australia is much more interested in ubiquitousness than in speed: “If we had to choose between ubiquitousness and speed, we would always go with a lesser speed and broader coverage.”

The conversation also tuned to some very interesting and cutting edge possibilities such as remote based employment (as raised in the CSIRO submission) where an employee could go fruit-picking from home, or a WA example where they do remote control mine rock breaking. These technologies could have huge implications for bringing people into the workforce who may have physical or geographical barriers to participation.

Sally added to this: “Another really good example is point-of view glasses, which are used for training, where people basically put on a pair of glasses while they are working and someone somewhere else can see what they are seeing. You can actually talk someone through fixing a car because the teacher can see what they can see. Some exciting stuff.”

Some exciting stuff indeed.

New Perspectives on Indigenous Education

An interview with Adult Learning Australia board member, Tony Dreise

Tony Dreise is an independent Indigenous Learning Consultant based on the North Coast of NSW. He is also a PhD Scholar at the Australian National University's Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research and has had extensive experience in Education and Indigenous policy. He is currently studying ways in which philanthropic bodies can more successfully engage with Indigenous people and invest their resources and add value to Indigenous education outcomes. Tony is from the Kamilaroi Aboriginal nation of north-west NSW and south-west Queensland. He is a keynote speaker at the Adult Learning Conference in September this year.



1. What led you to becoming a member of the Adult Learning Australia Board? What do you hope to achieve in your role?

I know it'll sound corny, but I'm lover of lifelong learning. Learning is so fundamentally important to both individuals and organisations/societies. Learning, skills, and knowledge acquisition provide the surest road to personal fulfillment, self and world understanding, and the tools to create better lives for individuals and groups of people. Learning in a highly complex and interconnected world has never been so important. It is underpinning the success of developing countries throughout the world.

My family and I have been fortunate enough to personally experience its inherent transformational value. I'm one of eight kids and seven of us have enjoyed university studies. *Thank you Mr Whitlam!* My mother and father both left school at year 7, thankfully we've all come along way since then.

To my mind, learning is fundamentally about exchange – of knowledge, skills, stories, narrative, perspectives and experience. Without it, we're all diminished. One of my favourite quotes is "no man is an island". Truer words have not been spoken. Learning provides the bridge between islands.

In terms of what I'm hoping to bring to the Board? I'd like to challenge some of the orthodoxies that prevail in educational discourse around 'equity'. I'm not convinced for one moment that institutional responses and resourcing to big institutions hold the unilateral key to improving learning and life outcomes for socially excluded and economically marginalised groups. I'm interested in stimulating and advocating for ground up movements and organic cultures and networks of lifelong learning, especially in Indigenous and intergenerationally disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

2. You are currently a PhD scholar at the ANU Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research. Can you tell us a bit about your research?

I am exploring the relationship between Indigenous education and Australian philanthropy; a burgeoning and exciting field. I'll be doing all of the usual stuff of literature reviews and field work studies, but I'm keen to elevate the study into more action oriented research method. I'm particularly interested in building alliances of philanthropic, corporate, community and government groups to work together for a decent period of time with a couple of communities that are motivated to create lifelong learning cultures and practices and through them – transformational change.

I'm particularly interested in the value of supplementary and complementary learning initiatives that are non-institutional based but can – in tandem – impact favourably on outcomes for Indigenous students in formal primary, secondary and tertiary education. We can tinker with curriculum, pedagogy, school leadership, leagues tables, teacher salaries, and new bricks and mortar all we like, but it takes families and villages to raise and teach children, not just schools. To this end, I believe there's a fundamental market imbalance between demand (for learning) forces and supply forces in most Australian communities, especially in regional and remote settings. I'm therefore interested in notions such as *Community Learning Accounts*.

3. What challenges do Indigenous Australians face in engaging in learning and skills development? How can ACE address some of these?

Perhaps in the form suggested above: through community learning accounts (where 'demand' is the driver) and by being more proactive in stimulating and supporting learning families and learning neighbourhoods?

Australia's earlier chapters of adult learning for Aboriginal people were not necessarily positive one. "Education" was a central feature in the paternalistic, assimilationist, and controlling tendencies of the then Aboriginal policy outlook. "Let's teach them" how to be domesticated and worthwhile labourers is now, thankfully, something most of us look back at with understandable discomfort if not appall.

Today, the compartmentalisation and structural architecture of education is deeply flawed when it comes to disadvantaged groups of Australians, including First Australians. It strikes me that the 'connect' between schools and ACE, for example, is largely one of 'disconnect'. Learning outcomes for young Indigenous Australians (40% are under 15 years) might be positively leveraged through more supported and active engagement of parents, carers, uncles and aunts in learning. Perhaps, ACE might give thought to innovative initiatives such as an "Elders as ACE Teachers" program.

4. Learning and knowledge can have very different meanings between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. How can ACE work within this space of difference towards mutually enriching outcomes?

Yes it is true there are differences. But there are also many similarities. We shouldn't lose sight of them. If we are prepared to adopt what the conventional literature in education has told us for a very long time – namely a learner centred approach – then the differences become less apparent. I don't believe it is true that Aboriginal people have an absolute universally preferred learning style. Such –cookie cutter– approaches to teaching is fraught. Variety is the spice of teaching as it is with life; so it might pay for our teaching to have far greater variety by reinventing the classroom of tomorrow. Classrooms can be kitchens, workshops, workplaces, streets, and national parks. Mens sheds provide a beacon to this end.

On a more overarching level, I've always had problems with deficit based approaches to Indigenous education. Indigenous knowledge systems – with some calibration – can enjoy somewhat of a renaissance by aligning with an international movement of greater sustainable living, 'sense of place', arts and music (contemporary as much as traditional), history and heritage, cross-cultural competence, and communal values. I find the current assumptions among some quarters – such as Gary Johns recent pieces in *The Australian* suggesting that self determination has failed and assimilation is the only way to go – narrow minded. There's a real chance right now for Indigenous people to pick up the 'invisible spears' of the twenty first century of sustainable practice, sense of place, and cross cultural exchange which can be far more liberating than constraining. Lifelong and lifewide learning are keys to unlocking such potential.

5. Can you tell us about an example of an ACE program or project that you have seen work well in engaging marginalised community-members. What can we learn from it?

There are stacks of success stories of ACE engaging with Indigenous communities throughout Australia in business governance, land management, adult literacy, and a plethora of other program areas. I wouldn't wish to single any one out.

What I would like to see into the future is ACE helping facilitate and respond to the kinds of grass roots learning movements such as Mens Sheds. These represent for me not just learning as a worthwhile lifelong activity, but shine light on the wonderful principles of social capital, human exchange, shared experience, a yarn, a cuppa, mentoring, informal counselling, and mateship. Bring on the Koori Sheds I say!

Tony is a keynote speaker at the 2011 Adult Learning Conference to be held in September of this year.

Australian Delegation to Settlement Summit

Last October, Cindy Gorton and Janice Matson from Learning Centre Link (now Linkwest) in Perth attended the Settlement Summit in New York City, USA.

The summit combined the biennial conference of the International Federation of Settlements and Neighborhood Centers, the national summit of United Neighborhood Centers of America and a city-wide gathering of United Neighborhood Houses of New York membership.

Held over 5 days in Manhattan locations, the summit attracted delegates from all parts of the world with over 600 people attending over the 5 days.

Other Australian delegates included Dr Donna Rooney from University of Technology Sydney, Merial Clark from Victoria and Christina Radburn from Local Community Services Association, New South Wales. It was an opportunity for all the Australian delegates to participate in a global event organised by a group of like-minded people and hear about the range of principles and values underpinning their work.



Janice Matson (right) and Cindy Gorton

Janice and Cindy share their impressions of what they saw:

The Centers

The first impression was the difference in scale of everything in the USA compared with Australia and other countries in some cases. A US centre with a budget of \$3,000,000 per annum and a staff of 250 people was considered small. Centres deal with huge numbers of people, thousands each week in some cases. It was sometimes difficult to relate to such enormity! An example of this was one centre in Houston, Texas that after Hurricane Katrina was given the task of helping 150,000 people with shelter, clothing, etc.



Delegates from Australia, Sweden, Germany, USA and Holland are pictured on the platform at Harlem station en route to Kingsbridge Heights. The tall buildings in the background are housing projects – ie public housing.

Many centres work out of several premises. Some own their own buildings, 2 or 3 in some cases. Many are multi-purpose organisations offering services and activities for people of all ages and from different cultural backgrounds. The services depend on the demographics of the community. At one centre the first language was Spanish, second was Chinese and English was the third.

Ways of working

The US model is predominantly a welfare or deficit model where workers do things for or to people. They feel that they are developing people but really they are providing services and just moving them through because of the sheer weight of the numbers. There was not much evidence of community development practices although we sensed a move in that direction, e.g. the community organisers who are being employed by the big settlement houses working with local leaders and community groups to achieve common goals.

We felt we had experiences and learning to offer, however, in Australia we have the luxury of smaller numbers, which allows us to engage more personally with members of our communities. Australia has thirty years experience of working on a model that grows people's potential e.g. by actively encouraging their participation on committees, etc.

Our focus is more on learning than welfare. In Australian centres people decide what they want to learn and then have the opportunity to teach or share their skill, building their confidence and personal capacity. It was interesting to hear that the manager of a centre in West Berlin was asked to set up a similar facility in East Berlin when the Berlin Wall came down. He established the centre and then handed it on to the local people to manage and run.

Management & governance

The US settlement house infrastructure has a long history – 100 years of successful programmes and structures, such as governance, management and community awareness. They talk about moving towards more community development and capacity building ways of working but their history makes it difficult for them to change track.

Community members don't seem to participate in decision-making processes at centres. They are not able to influence the programme of activities and the management rely on staff members. It's a more top-down approach. It was expressed to us that they would like to work more like we do by engaging more people in participatory democracy grass roots movements.

Speakers and presentations

In general, the workshops and presentations that we attended were truly international. There were talks on innovative multicultural programmes, the place of arts and culture in the community, evaluation methods, family support programmes, community gardens and community events, social action and community organisers in New York districts, history of settlement houses in both America and England, use of technology to link with community members, leaders of the settlement movement through the decades and the centres/settlement houses caught up in natural disasters and once in a lifetime events, e.g. Hurricane Katrina and the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Keynote talks included speakers from major philanthropic organisations such as Kelloggs and the Bank of America.

We had much in common with Canada and Germany, as they didn't have such overwhelming numbers in their centres and often their centres were referred to as neighbourhood or community centres not settlement houses. The Canadians seem to work in more of a community development and capacity building way.

Australian Presentation

'Down Under Centres' was presented by the Australian delegates. The participants were treated to clever graphics comparing the size of Australia to the USA and Europe.

Examples were described of the kind of challenges faced by people living in such a sparsely populated country and often in very remote areas. The questions and the lively discussion were evidence of the success of the workshop. About 15 people attended.



George Washington Park gate



In the second row is a Romany woman from St Petersburg, Russia. Accompanied by an interpreter, she dressed in her national costume at the conference. She is a youth and family worker with a non-government organisation.

2013 IFS meeting in Perth

The Perth Convention Centre supported the notion of holding an IFS meeting in Perth and provided us with promotional materials to give to the IFS Board members. We attended the AGM and the subsequent Board meeting to put the suggestion of a future IFS meeting in WA.

It would not be feasible to hold an international conference in Australia at this stage because there are very few IFS members in the southern hemisphere. However, to hold a Board meeting (24 members from North America, Europe and South America) in Perth was considered a possibility.

It could be scheduled to synchronise with a Link event, conference or other; ANHCA meeting; ALA conference, etc. IFS President Dr Michael Zisser supports the idea of holding a Board meeting in Australia and is keen to expand the membership of IFS into Asia. Locations of IFS members are shown on a map on the IFS website.

When we left the meeting they were still debating the location of the 2012 conference with England and Sweden the front runners.

Article based on conference report by Janice Matson.

IFS – HISTORY AND PURPOSE

The International Federation of Settlements and Neighbourhood Centers (IFS) is an association of national, regional and local organisations working to strengthen communities around the world. Its mission is to build an inclusive global community by empowering, inspiring and connecting people who are working locally for social justice. IFS members include multi-purpose, community-based organisations all over the globe, from North America and Europe to South America and Asia. The purpose of IFS is to facilitate networking, to encourage the exchange of innovative ideas and best practices, and to influence social policies on global levels. For further information about the IFS [click here to visit their website.](#)

Minister responsible for the Teaching Profession

An interview with Minister for Higher Education & Skills, The Hon Peter Hall, MLC

1. Victoria's current Adult and Community Education (ACE) Strategy is called A Stronger ACFE and was launched by the previous state government. Do you remain committed to this strategy or are you looking at developing your own ACE strategy?

I am very committed to a strong ACE sector that continues to help Victorians gain more skills and expand their employment and learning opportunities. My experience as a learner through ACE and the experiences of Victorians I meet as I travel around the state are compelling evidence of what ACE can achieve for the people of Victoria – no matter where they are located.

Our initiatives since coming to Government – such as the support of the roll out of the Adult, Community and Further Education (ACFE) Board's Learn Local Awareness Strategy – are a testament to our commitment to a strong network of locally-based ACE providers.

I am taking every opportunity to meet the people of the Victorian ACE sector formally and informally as I travel around the state and listen to what they have to say about current policy and how the future can be shaped.

2. Here in Victoria we have two ACE Peaks: ACEVic and Association of Neighbourhood Houses and Learning Centres (ANHLC). What do you see as the role of our State peak bodies and how do you intend to work with them in government?

Peak bodies are an important mechanism for the collective voice of the ACE sector to be heard in a lot of different forums. It is a clear indicator of the diversity of the sector that these two bodies work together in this area.

I would hope that all the ACE sector peak bodies, both State and national, continue to keep me informed of the issues that are concerning their members in Victoria and provide a forum for those members to debate issues of state and national significance.

I am looking forward to attending the ACEVic annual conference in May and discussing items of interest with members in person.

3. ACE funding is very much focused on stimulating the market for training and creating pathways into Vocational Education Training (VET). Do you see a role for ACE that is not directly related to employment, such as learning to improve your health and wellbeing, learning for civic participation, or learning to age positively?

I support learning for many purposes including all those you mention. I also take a broad view of the place of VET that is focused on pathways to employment. Many people who gain employment as a result of ACE learning feel a sense of pride as a result of contributing to their community through finding meaningful employment.

In addition, they often feel a greater sense of belonging that comes from their engagement with the local community in their course. So I don't necessarily see a distinction between economic and community outcomes.

4. Everyone is aware of the skill shortages across Australia, including Victoria. The experience of some of our members is that skills shortages in particular areas can make it hard to gain attention from government for broader community learning challenges such as literacy and numeracy, generic skills and what we call 'lifewide learning' that is; learning to manage your own health and wellbeing, build resilience and manage the various stages of your life. Does this tension exist within the Education and Skills area in Victoria? What commitment is there to maintaining funding for long-term skills challenges, at the same time as responding to important immediate needs?

In our 2011 Victorian Families Statement, the Government talks about the need for skills to boost Victorians job prospects and life opportunities, including life chances for children given the strong link between Year 12 completion rates and the skill levels of



students' parents.

You've identified literacy and numeracy and generic skills in your question and I can assure you that these are areas the Government is very conscious of. The Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey by the ABS in 2006 reported that 46% of Australians aged 15 to 74 years did not have the prose literacy skills needed to meet the complex demands of everyday life and work. Results were similar for document literacy and numeracy.

One example of our response to this issue is in Gippsland, where we are about to implement a demonstration project that focuses on building foundation skills as a necessary first step to improved personal and community outcomes, as well as employment, in a region undergoing economic transition.

Gippsland residents will be able to access the range of Foundation Level qualifications which improve literacy, numeracy, language and work skills and attract government subsidies under the Victorian Training Guarantee regardless of prior qualifications and experience, dependent on appropriate citizenship status. Foundation level courses include the well regarded certificates in general education for adults which are offered by many ACE organisations.

With respect to funding, balancing the 'now' demands with longer term strategies is always a challenge. My approach is to listen respectfully to all opinions in deciding where to prioritise resources. I have recently announced a review of VET fees and funding that were introduced under skills reforms by the previous government. During the review, registered training organisations including ACE providers will have the opportunity to advise me on how they consider government funds can best be used to support immediate and long term skills challenges.

5. You have previously worked as a secondary school teacher. How have your experiences in this role impacted on your views about disengaged young people? What role can ACE play in this issue?

There are many contributing factors to disengagement. These factors vary significantly from person to person and therefore there is no single solution to the problem. As Minister I have had the opportunity to witness a number of very different projects that are working with young people who are either disengaged or at risk of disengagement.

The common element of those programs is the delivery of learning that is relevant to the personal needs of those involved. ACE providers best understand local needs, are able to be flexible in structuring programs to suit these needs and provide a supportive, non-threatening delivery environment.

The challenge for Government is to provide a means of funding for programs that by necessity are widely varied, while still maintaining accountability for the expenditure of public monies.

6. You have said that the Coalition Government is determined to address regional imbalances in education and training opportunities. What role can ACE play in making it easier for rural and regional Victorians to participate in education and develop their skills?

As a regional MP, I am all too aware of the inequalities in access to education and training faced by people in regional areas. Addressing these inequalities is a priority of the Victorian Government. I am fortunate to be able to draw on personal experience of the role ACE can play in providing local learning opportunities for communities and businesses in regional Victoria. What I have experienced in Sale is the experience of people all over the state.

Because ACE centres are both embedded in the community and connected with a broad network, people in places as diverse as Bright and Boort can be supported locally to access a vast range of educational opportunities and gain new skills. ACE organisations can also help learners to transition to higher education opportunities at TAFE or university.

The Coalition Government's Regional Partnerships Facilitation Fund also aims to address the regional imbalance issue and provide regional students with greater flexibility, options and choice. The initiative aims to increase alliances between TAFE institutes and universities to deliver a greater range of higher education programs in regional centres, giving more students the option to study in their hometown.

7. In the previous budget, the federal government increased funding for language and literacy and for innovative approaches to informal education as a result of Australia's results in the 2008 Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey, which indicated that a significant proportion of the adult population lacked sufficient literacy and numeracy skills to meet the demands of the workforce. What response is your government making to the adult literacy and numeracy challenge?

The Victorian Government recognises that not having functional literacy and numeracy skills limits people's opportunities in the workplace and community. Our commitment to unlimited access to Foundation Level courses is an important component of the approach and will ensure that people can have access to the resources they need to develop their skills.

In addition, many of the initial training programs that ACE organisations offer under the 'pre-accredited' banner are directly or indirectly developing literacy, numeracy and generic work readiness skills. We are investigating further the best ways to approach the huge task of improving literacy and numeracy among adult Victorians.

Connecting seniors yields a broad band of benefits



Seeing a photo of your grandchild just hours after it has been born, researching family history, staying in daily contact with overseas relatives, these are just some of the positive outcomes that users of the Broadband for Seniors program are reporting across Australia.

With the 2000th live site opening at the Yarraville Senior Citizens Centre in February this year, the delivery of the Australian Government's \$15 million Broadband for Seniors initiative is now complete.

Since the initiative launched in September 2009, an estimated 94,000 seniors across Australia have had access to the kiosks and training in sites from Fitzroy Crossing, Western Australia to Swansea, Tasmania, dramatically increasing the availability of internet services and building their confidence in using technology.

Since the initiative kicked off, over 43,000 online lessons have been completed, with the most popular courses being Introduction to Computers, Introduction to Word Processing, Introduction to the Internet and Introduction to Email.

Far from using the internet for purely practical reasons such as banking and paying bills, it turns out the most significant outcomes are much more personal.

In a project evaluation containing feedback from the kiosk hosts, increasing social connectedness was one of the most frequently reported benefits:

Communication within our Village has improved with residents having access to gmail. The Kiosk has galvanised our elderly residents into communicating with their friends and family, exchanging digital photos and videos. It has literally revolutionised their lives.

Many hosts reported that their users' confidence with technology broadened out to confidence in others areas of life:

S is in her early seventies. She lives alone in a permanent dwelling on a local caravan park. She suffers from a debilitating mobility condition and post viral syndrome. Although very intelligent with an enquiring mind, she has very low self-esteem and confidence. Prior to joining the project she spent much of her time alone at home. After a number of lessons, S's son, who lives at a distance, bought her a laptop. The differences between her laptop and the project computers were enough to throw her into a state of complete disarray taking us back almost to square one. In S's interest and to prevent her giving up, we have worked with her on her own laptop. She now has the internet at home, and with the help of a good text book has learned to scan and print. She sends and receives emails, surfs the net, downloads crochet patterns and plays games. She has joined U3A and attends two of their craft classes. Her confidence is much improved, her whole attitude to life seems to have changed and she also appears to be

managing her health issues more effectively.

As users learnt basic computer skills through the Broadband for Seniors program, they were often more likely to access further learning:

We have had a number of participants have their first computer experience using the BFS computers. It is very satisfying to see these seniors get excited at using a computer so much that they then purchase their own computer and return to us for more advanced lessons.

In other instances, the skills gained through the BFS program and the confidence this brought, empowered seniors to move into new roles:

One benefit to our organisation is that a senior who received lessons from a tutor went on to a volunteer role in the library.

The BFS project also enabled participants to gain the physical skills that younger people take for granted, such as using the mouse. One kiosk host reported that the project had assisted a user in recovering fine motor skills after a stroke.

A number of hosts observed that the Broadband for Seniors project led to seniors accessing other services within the centre that they hadn't used previously and inhabiting the centres more broadly:

We have found that since the implementation of this program, a greater number of seniors now visit our public access centre, which traditionally has been dominated by youth. The kiosk provides a quiet area ideal for seniors' research, learning and exploration.

There are many positive statements emerging from the Broadband for Seniors project, however project coordinator, Mary Hannan, still feels there are challenges ahead to ensure that the successes can continue. These include negotiating for continued funding, supporting the sustainability of kiosks, as well as recruiting and training the required number of volunteer tutors. The results of current funding negotiations will be known in the May budget of this year.

The Australian Government's Broadband for Seniors initiative has been delivered and managed by NEC Australia, leading a consortium of the Australian Seniors Computer Clubs Association, the University of the Third Age Online (U3A Online) and Adult Learning Australia.

ALA Member Profile

In each issue of Quest, Adult Learning Australia will profile one of our member organisations as a way of sharing our learning and our challenges. This issue we meet Ros Currie from the Tresillian Community Centre in Nedlands, Perth.

After 31 years of operation, the Tresillian Community Centre has earned its place as an integral part of the Nedlands community. From the early days of the Nedlands Learning Centre and subsequent Tresillian Community Centre, it has built itself upon the principles of shared learning and a spirit of volunteerism.



The Tresillian Community Centre began as Nedlands Community Learning Centre in 1978. It was started by a small group of mostly young mothers who were keen to create a centre for people to socialise and take part in various activities. The seven original programs offered were: needlecraft, crochet and knitting, French, centering down, bridge, Mah Jong and dressmaking. In 1980 the centre moved location to Tresillian Hospital and the name was changed to Tresillian Community Centre.

From the early days of the Nedlands Learning Centre, the decision to provide quality play centre facilities was a key factor in its success. It was built up by community support, hard work and volunteerism. Today, the 'Great Tresillian Playcentre Garage Sale' is still a major fundraiser for the crèche.

Other special features of Tresillian include a café was opened on site in the first year and is still a popular meeting and exhibition space today, and the artists-in-residence program which was designed to offer studio space in return for the benefit of exposure of the artists' work and a commitment to run some classes teaching adults and children.

Today, they have 10 individual artists in studios plus the Printmakers Association of WA in another. The centre runs 75 courses. Over a year they have about 50 volunteers participating in the centre's activities.

ALA speaks to coordinator Ros Currie

1. What do you love best about working at Tresillian?

I love the people meeting them, seeing them enjoying themselves and being amazed at what they achieve.

2. What does Tresillian do well?

The centre has a particular focus on art courses, currently running 12 courses most of which are tutored by professional artists.

We have a program of about 14 exhibitions a year at the centre and one of these is the Student and Tutor exhibition. This exhibition provides us with a chance to enjoy a range of works of great diversity of style and subject, and provides an opportunity for both tutors and students to exhibit work from differing stages of their creative journeys. Works are by both well-known and emerging artists and show a wide range of ideas and media, each telling their own story, representing their own place and time.

3. What are the biggest challenges of your role?

Finding enough space to run all the courses requested. Ensuring the 90 year old building where we are based is maintained in good condition. Working within a Local Government structure and the associated paperwork.

4. Why do you think community education is important?

Community education is important for allowing people to develop skills at any age in areas that are of interest to them personally. It provides a non threatening environment where learning can take place at a pace to suit the individual.

5. What would you like to see in the future for Tresillian?

My dream for the future of the centre would be lots more space, additional staff and of course additional funding.

6. You can't get through your day without...

a cup of tea!

Tribute to Vaughan Croucher

Adult Learning Australia is very sad to announce the death of board member Vaughan Croucher last December.

Vaughan served on the ALA board for over 10 years, having been involved in the initial formation of the ACT branch and in advising government on directions for the ACE sector in the late eighties.

During his tenure on the board, he was greatly valued for the high standard of financial expertise and guidance he brought to the organisation, as well as his personal values of fairness and justice.

Vaughan held a deep commitment to Adult and Community Education. From his early career as a primary, secondary and TAFE teacher, he went on to serve on numerous committees such as the Australian Council for Adult Literacy and the ACT Advisory Committee on ACE, as Executive Officer. He believed in the concept of a Learning Community and maintained a vision for the ACT to become a Learning City.

Vaughan was often described as the ALA board's 'Rock of Gibraltar'. He was always dependable, balanced and willing to help colleagues with any enquiries, despite the demands of his own full time career as Academic Advisor with the Canberra Institute of Technology.

His meticulous and thorough management of budgetary issues were always appreciated but he will be most warmly remembered for the open and honest relationships he established and sustained with fellow board members and for his lifetime's dedication to learning. He will be greatly missed.



Tribute to Bess Dwyer 1914 – 2010

Just a little old lady from the bush

"I'm just a little old lady from the bush..." was Bess Dwyer's usual opening gambit as she launched into her spiel to the bureaucrat or politician on the other side of the desk. She'd proceed to put forward all the sound arguments why funding should be made available to one or other of the many community services she initiated in the Richmond Valley towns of Rileys Hill, Woodburn and Evans Head.

Bess was always passionate about protecting the environment. A national newspaper recognised her for waging a successful campaign against the mineral sand mining of an area of bushland that had been leased and loved by the family for many years. It has now become part of the Broadwater National Park. Some of the trails through this bush are named after Bess.

Her persuasiveness with politicians and bureaucrats helped save the Rileys Hill school building as the first Neighbourhood Centre on the North Coast, and in the development of community services such as Meals on Wheels, Home Care, Disabled Services, Emergency Transport and Community Adult Education throughout the Richmond Valley. She was an active participant in all the North Coast regional adult education gatherings and attended several national Australian Association of Adult Education conferences in the 1980s.

At the local level, Bess organised excursions for rock fossicking, bird watching as well as painting and craft workshops. She set up a Child Care Cooperative, Adventure Playground & coordinated annual Carnivale and Senior Citizens Week activities and, in 1986, was named Senior Citizen of the Year for the Richmond Valley. She established the Mid-Richmond Neighbourhood Centre in Woodburn and acted as advisor in the setting up of several others.

An inveterate networker, Bess was voted in as the Hon. Sec. for the Steering Committee of the Richmond-Tweed Regional Council of Social Development in the early 1980s. She took an active role as the regional representative for the NSW Local Community Services Association. Often at her own expense, she drove or travelled by train reporting back to anyone interested about the latest news from the state gatherings she attended.

Her children and grand-children value and remember her adventurous spirit and boundless energy, her delight in the natural world and her passion for preserving the environment. Others remember her strong sense of social justice – speaking out against the Vietnam War in rural Australia in the 1960s and '70s took a lot of courage. As champion of the underdog at school, she would challenge teachers if she thought they were picking on someone & towards the end of her life, she would speak up for and tenderly care for fellow residents in the nursing home.

At one stage, she summarised her life: "No time to be bored... I was born at the right place and to the right parents, married the right man and had the right children and friends". This "little old lady from the bush" has left a legacy of the value of lifelong learning that is still felt by her many extended family members and friends.

Beth Hansen (long-time friend and fellow former Neighbourhood Centre Co-ordinator) Lennox Head NSW



Bess Dwyer (left) and Beth Hansen