

QUEST

ISSUE 3 2020

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Adult Learners Week launch success

We got used to their faces on nightly news bulletins during last summer's horrendous bushfires.

Shane Fitzsimmons, then NSW Rural Fire Service Commissioner, guided NSW through one of the biggest natural disasters in our nation's history. And beside him, Auslan interpreter Sean Sweeney ensured that the deaf community had access to vital emergency information. Despite their career success, for both their schooling got off to a rocky start.

Shane Fitzsimmons and Sean Sweeney shared their stories of resilience and renewal through learning at the Adult Learners Week 2020 launch hosted by comedian and writer Catherine Deveny. The online launch also featured presentations from Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business, Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash, ABC presenter and host of Backroads, Heather Ewart and interviews with the winners of the 2020 Adult Learners Week scholarships.

In her official launch, Minister Cash encouraged people to connect with adult education during Adult Learners Week. 'The benefits of lifelong learning are wide-ranging. It can improve self-confidence, connect us with our communities and assist us to be more adaptable to changes in the workforce. As we face the challenges of COVID-19, this has never been more important. The Morrison Government recognises the importance of adult learning and the development of skills regardless of age.'

ABC presenter Heather Ewart reflected on the resilience she'd seen in rural and regional communities across the country as host of Backroads and said that what was common to thriving communities was a commitment to trying new things and learning together.

Shane Fitzsimmons, now Head of Resilience NSW, says at school he wasn't engaged academically and couldn't apply himself in subjects that didn't interest him. He spent plenty of time in detention and being punished but it didn't make much difference. He left school and took up a trade, training as an automotive mechanic.

The turning point in his life happened in 1985 when he was 16 and joined the NSW Rural Fire Service as a volunteer. 'I found a real sense of belonging, a sense of inclusion, a sense

'Getting exposure to different ways of learning was important for me to get to where I am today.' Sean Sweeney, Auslan interpreter

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lifewide learning
for all Australians*

Message from the CEO



A renewed Declaration could encourage a collaborative approach to allow the ACE sector to make a greater contribution in supporting the Skills National Cabinet Reform Committee agenda.

None of us could have imagined that 2020 would be such a tough year. It has challenged us in so many ways. While we need to address the current crisis, we must also focus on new ways of being with one another that are safe, healthy and enriching, and which renews the relationship we have with the places in which we live.

Better education and learning opportunities can provide a critical stimulus if we are to realign the economy and build confidence and resilience in response to COVID 19. ALA's recently released ACE Environmental Scan highlights the important role ACE plays as both registered training providers (RTOs) in the VET system and as non-RTOs. It also identifies that relative to other RTO providers community education RTOs delivers more successfully to a proportionally higher number of marginalised and disadvantaged Australians including people with disabilities, people from CALD backgrounds, the unemployed, and regional and rural learners.

The problem with the Australian government focusing so strongly on the VET system to lift our skills base is that it largely ignores those many ACE providers who provide non-formal learning programs that act as crucial pathways into formal VET programs.

Many learners who have low levels of formal education or poor experiences of formal education need different and supported entry points to successfully pursue further education and learning.

Our Scan calls for validation of the ACE sector in all of its forms and recommends further research on the impact of non-accredited ACE and personal enrichment learning to develop an evidence base and profile its true impact. It also calls on state/territory and federal governments to build on the potential of ACE and to enhance and strengthen the community provider workforce.

So at a time when we are calling for greater recognition of the work of the sector it is disappointing to see that South Australia has made substantial budget cuts to the ACE sector over the 2019-22 period. Yet in New South Wales recently they released their first policy statement on ACE, and together with the Victorian Ministerial Statement on ACE launched last year, it sets a benchmark for the Australian Government to renew the 2008 Ministerial Declaration of ACE. A renewed Declaration could encourage a collaborative approach to allow the ACE sector to make a greater contribution in supporting the Skills National Cabinet Reform Committee agenda.

UNESCO describes knowledge and learning as 'humanity's greatest renewable resources' for responding to challenges like COVID and rethinking and inventing alternative solutions.

Under the pressure of COVID, we've had to rethink our approaches to teaching and learning. It's been both an enormous undertaking and a great opportunity. Now we need to make sure that in the shift towards recovery that adult learning and education is recognised as more important than ever in ensuring equity pathways into new jobs and opportunities.

We can see the power and potential of adult learning and education in the shining examples of the Adult Learners Week 2020 scholarship winners and the adult education providers that offered many hundreds of events both online and face to face during one of the most difficult periods in recent history. Congratulations to all. Your examples leave us with admiration and hope.

Jenny Macaffer, CEO



Heather Ewart from ABC Backroads says she believes what is common to resilient communities in rural and regional Australia is a commitment to trying new things and learning together.

(story continued from p. 1)

of purpose. There was a very strong sense of friendship and the organisation became like a family.'

Apart from formal training in technical skills required for firefighting, Shane learned essential life skills. 'I developed skills in teamwork, communication, leadership, negotiation, compromise, making decisions, taking initiative.'

He also discovered he loved learning. 'I found this real thirst for bettering myself wherever I could and it was because I had found something I was interested in and passionate about.'

Shane took a training role in the organisation and thrived.

When it comes to studying, Shane's advice to young people is to pursue something that interests them and matters to them. 'If you're interested in what you are studying, I firmly believe that you have a greater chance of personal fulfilment.'

Shane spent 35 years with the Rural Fire Service and has seen the powerful effect of adult learning on volunteers from all walks of life. 'In local brigades, membership is reflective of the local community. We come from all different backgrounds. Not all of us have got a strong education, not all of us can read or write.'

So taking on formal training and completing it successfully can be a powerful moment. 'When you give people who haven't had that educational background a nationally recognised certificate of completion and it is the first qualification they have ever received, many of them feel pretty emotional about that.'

Sean Sweeney is the first hearing person born in his deaf family. But interpreting was a career he took to in mid-life, after a redundancy at 45 forced him to consider his career options.

'If you told me at the age of 20 that I would be on the stage interpreting the bushfires at the age of 50, I would have laughed at you.'

School was tough. Sean attributed the difficulties to coming from a home where deafness was the norm, growing up in a different culture and having to speak a different language at school than the one he communicated in at home.

'I was a bit of a sporty kid so I focussed on that more than I did on my reading and writing and understanding of what was going on in the classroom.'

At 45, he enrolled in a TAFE course in Auslan interpreting. But completing a formal qualification was just the start.

In short courses, workshops, online classes and conferences, Sean has looked to learn from others. 'I learned by talking to more experienced interpreters. I tend to try and look for ones with knowledge and ask lots of questions.'

'From there, I joined other associations and met other colleagues, learning as I grew and did more interpreting. Exposure is the key, really.'

It wasn't until five years ago that he was diagnosed as dyslexic. Then things fell into place. 'When it comes to learning I've never been a reader or a writer. I'm the complete opposite. I go to audiobooks for learning and I use the computer's voice to text process in a computer.'

'I have learnt new ways of learning. In doing so, it has just empowered me even more.'



Meet the ALW scholarship winners

Three outstanding adult learners who overcame significant obstacles and turned their lives around through adult education are this year's scholarship winners.



Chris Roland was traumatised by domestic violence and struggled to speak to people or leave the house, now she's a confident communicator who looks forward to empowering others.

Ghazal Sharhani was depressed and isolated by her lack of English, now she's dreaming of the next step in her career.

Loran McKean lacked confidence about her ability to study, now she's found a new life and is giving back to her community.

Meet the winners of the 2020 Adult Learners Week scholarships, awarded to outstanding adult learners to enable them to continue learning.

Chris Roland, TAFE SA

When Chris Roland left home for her first class at TAFE SA in 2019 after 30 years away from a classroom, she almost didn't make it.

As a survivor of domestic violence, the idea of travelling by bus to Adelaide's busy CBD was overwhelming so she wore a hoodie and sunglasses to avoid attention. 'In the city I kept having to stop and go into shop doorways because there were thousands of footsteps behind me and I didn't know whose they were. My stress levels went through the roof.

'Once I got to TAFE, it was a very different atmosphere. It was a course for women taught by women and I felt safe.

'I loved it from the moment I started. All my lecturers are fantastic. All my classmates are like sisters. Everyone helps each other. I've found friends for life there. I'm a totally different person now. I've still got a long way to go but a year ago I didn't think I'd be this confident now.

'I felt proud when they told me they had nominated me for the scholarship. When I found out I'd won I felt very

honoured. I have not been at all academic, and here's me winning a scholarship. It means the world to me.

'I am a very positive person and I think that the opportunity for learning is in every situation. So you can either be a victim or you can learn a lesson from what you've experienced and be empowered. It took a long time for me to learn that.

'I have changed so much. Before I struggled to speak to people and leave my house because of trauma and now I catch buses, go out in public, communicate assertively, speak in front of an audience for presentations and believe in myself again.'

Chris has three subjects to complete in her Certificate 4 in Womens Studies and hopes to graduate in April 2021, after which she hopes to go on and do a Certificate in Community Services.

Ghazal Sharhani, Preston Reservoir Adult and Community Education

It was a moment of loneliness and isolation that propelled Ghazal Sharhani towards a class that would change her life.

She was living in Melbourne's northern suburbs, having arrived by boat in 2013 four years earlier from Iran. Faced with a different culture and a different language, Ghazal felt isolated and unable to express herself, cut off from the person that she was in Iran. 'I always defined myself through my work and my studies and here I was without those things. I was really struggling. I was depressed and I felt very lonely.'





Chris Roland looks forward to working with and empowering other women who have experienced domestic violence.

In Iran, Ghazal was a very social person who loved her job as an assistant at a pathology clinic and took pleasure in doing it well. In 2013 she left her home, her job, family and friends to travel to Australia to be re-united with her 7 year old daughter.

When a friend recommended English classes at Preston Reservoir Adult Community Education (PRACE) Ghazal decided to take action. 'I wanted to be a useful person here, I wanted to have a good job and be successful.' Ghazal dreamed of studying pathology. The key that would unlock her dreams of a successful future and a career as a pathology nurse was English.

She enrolled at PRACE in the Certificate III in English as an Additional Language (EAL) in 2018. Despite her fluency in Arabic and Persian, learning English has been a struggle but she has flourished.

'I tell people that the people at PRACE are my second family. They are supportive, caring and loving people. They are amazing.'

'I haven't had a very smooth or easy life but I'm a strong person who tried really hard for my dreams.'

When she heard she had been awarded the ALW2020 scholarship Ghazal says, 'I am so excited, I can't express my feelings, but I am very happy.'

'I can't find the words to thank all my teachers, all the staff. I think I am a very lucky person that I found PRACE.'

Loran McKean, Bass Coast Adult Learning

Loran McKean was travelling light when she arrived in Wonthaggi from Queensland in 2019.

'I had nothing much, just a car seat and a suitcase and my daughter on my hip.'

She had over 10 years experience in cane farming but

she realised work would be difficult to find without qualifications. So she enrolled in a Certificate 2 in horticulture at Bass Coast Adult Learning, thinking it would open doors in landscaping, gardening and nursery work.

Initially Loran wasn't sure the course would teach her much. 'I thought I knew the ins and outs of plants and soil and all that sort of thing.'

But the course forced Loran to reappraise what she knew.

'In Queensland we used to just spray and rip the ground. But I learnt so much more. I've scrapped the old school farming ways. I learnt a lot about permaculture and organic farming. We learnt about irrigation, feeding plants, pruning, looking after the soil. I was really amazed. It was a whole new world.'

'I absolutely surprised myself because I walked into it thinking, "I can't do it." But it all proved me wrong. I stuck at it and worked hard and here I am.'

Loran is using her new skills to give back to the community. She has rehabilitated BCAL's rundown garden, planting it with donated seeds and giving the produce to local food banks which have a shortage of fresh fruit and vegetables.

Loran says it's very satisfying to be able to do good with the skills she's learned. 'I came along with nothing. I know what it's like to be on the food line. This community welcomed me when I arrived, there were services to help and I was able to rebuild my life. Now I can use the skills I learned to do good and give back.'

'The course has really opened a lot of doors for me. My daughter starts school at the start of next year and I'll be looking for work. I'd like to get onto the council garden crew. That would be my dream job.'

You can read the winners full stories at ala.asn.au/stories/

Adult Learners Week around Australia



Hundreds of events during Adult Learners Week encouraged Australians to enjoy the rejuvenation and renewal that comes with adult education.

During the first week of September, and despite the COVID pandemic, neighbourhood houses, community colleges, libraries, local councils, TAFEs and more celebrated Adult Learners Week around Australia.

This year's winners of the 'Best Event' awards went to: Macquarie Community College (NSW), Ballarat Neighbourhood Centre (VIC), Clare Valley Library Service (SA), Central Coast Community College and ATWEA (NSW).

Waimaria Currie, Community Engagement and Digital Coordinator, ATWEA

'Due to COVID we decided to run workshops online. We filmed our trainers demonstrating different types of skills through our 'Learn a new skill with ATWEA' series which we shared across social media.

'We held our awards ceremony offsite at Newcastle Exhibition and Convention Centre (NEX) this year. We had a really great night giving student and staff awards to recognise their achievements.

'Not everyone who wanted to come could attend. We decided to live stream our event via Zoom. I think live streaming is a great way of creating an inclusive event.

'Winning an award was really exciting for us. We felt like it was a great reward for the effort that we put in.'

Ka Wong, Marketing Specialist, Macquarie Community College

'Adult Learners Week is a time for us to get out in our community and show people all the options available, and that we're there to help so they feel included and welcome.

'We offered a variety of in person classes that were COVID safe as well as online options. We know a lot of people don't have the digital skills to participate in online classes so we offered COVID safe classes on campus in how to use Zoom as well.'

'Our job-seeking taster classes were very popular. These included resume writing, interview skills, using LinkedIn for finding work. Our most popular on campus class was flower arrangement — but then again it's always a favourite.

'When I got a message that we'd won one of the best event prizes I immediately sent a screenshot to my manager saying, "We won! All that hard work paid off!"





Ballarat Neighbourhood Centre celebrated ALW by sharing stories of learners like Milad Nachar who now works at the Centre as a volunteer.

Heather Lymburn, Library Manager, Clare Valley Library Service

‘With COVID we realised we really needed to focus on skills that helped people cope better like yoga and mindfulness and gardening. We were able to offer face to face classes. We have the town hall just across the road, so it’s well spaced for social distancing.

‘We contacted borrowers who we knew had the skills to see if they would be willing to teach others and I was blown away by their generosity. So many people said afterwards that they really loved it and they’d like to learn more so at the moment we are liaising to see if we can run short courses.

‘It was such exciting news for a small country library to win an ALW2020 award. We were so honoured and thrilled.’

Vicki Coltman, Executive Officer, Ballarat Neighbourhood Centre

‘Every week is Adult Learners Week for us so when it comes to September we like to celebrate our learners because they are great examples for other people.

‘Many people who do courses and classes with us come back and volunteer with us, developing themselves and giving back to the community. It makes them feel good

and it builds their confidence. We put a post up every day on Facebook highlighting these kinds of stories and we got some really good responses. We also had media interest with articles featuring our learners in the local paper and TV and we linked these to Adult Learners Week.’

Baylee Mashman, Student Services Compliance Administrator, Central Coast Community College

‘We wanted to showcase what we do best so we decided to make videos that were engaging and simple that featured students and trainers undertaking fun activities you could expect to complete in a classroom. We also did a virtual tour of our new facilities where it looks like you’re walking through the different parts of the college yourself and introduced three new programs.

‘We had zero budget and shot it all on an iPhone. We only started working on it two weeks before Adult Learners Week so it was go, go, go.

‘I really didn’t expect it to go as well as it did. The reaction on Facebook was amazing with astounding numbers sharing, liking our content and our page. People have been in touch congratulating us, it’s been fantastic. A lot of our students have mentioned it and we’ve had additional enrolments so it totally exceeded our expectations.’



Community newspaper thrives

In 2016 Guyra Adult Learning Association established a community newspaper and it's been a learning experience for everyone involved.



It's 4.30 am on Wednesday morning in the small town of Guyra in New South Wales and the lights are on at the local adult learning centre. A group of volunteers is busily folding copies of the *Guyra Gazette*, the town's weekly newspaper, and getting ready to drop them off at the post office at 6.30 am. The free paper is delivered to all 1685 households in the town and across the 2365 postcode.

New England Community College, or Guyra Adult Learning Association (GALA) as its known, might seem an odd place to be producing a local newspaper. But it's a local institution, having operated in Guyra for almost four decades. Everyone in the community uses it — not just for adult education courses and classes but for administrative services, local meetings, even tourist information. And GALA is secretary for a number of community organisations including the local Agricultural Show Society, Potato Growers Association, Heritage Railway/trike, and Ladies Golf Association. So it's the place to go to find out what's going on in and around town.

'We're a hub for news,' Dorothy Lockyer, Executive Officer of GALA says. 'People come to us for all sorts of things and with all sorts of questions. And if we can't help them find out what they need, we know someone who will.'

GALA has been producing the *Guyra Gazette* since 2016 when the town's only newspaper *The Guyra Argus* shut its doors. Production of the *Argus* was shifted to Armidale 40 kilometres away and local content dwindled. 'The same news stories that appeared in the *Argus* appeared in newspapers in Glen Innes and Tamworth. It didn't feel like it reflected our community anymore,' Dorothy says.

Around the same time, local Guyra Shire Council was absorbed into The Armidale Regional Council. 'It felt like we were losing our local voice and our identity.'

With the backing of the town, GALA decided to establish a new free paper that focussed on local news, hiring the two

staff made redundant by the closure of the *Argus* office and leasing a printing machine. The first 16-page issue went out in December 2016. 'The community's response has been marvellous,' Dorothy says. 'It's given our community a voice and it's a way of spreading the word about what's happening around town which is vital in keeping people connected especially in times of drought and pandemic.'

It's been a steep learning curve, especially when it comes to the printing technology. GALA's commercial printer is left on to print overnight.

Tuesday nights can be nerve-wracking, Dorothy says, 'We just pray the printer doesn't break down half way through or we have to go in at 2.30 in the morning and finish it off using the old photocopier which is a real chore.'

Journalist Janelle Stewart was with the *Guyra Argus* for 10 years before the local office closed its doors. Even though she said she was expecting it, it was still a wrench. So when she got a call a few months later asking if she would be interested in starting a new paper she jumped at the chance.

The *Gazette* has its own mix of regional and hyper local stories. 'We still do regional stories, particularly as we are now part of a regional council, but our focus is on how it affects our town and what the people think.'

A large part of Janelle's job is gathering local news. 'People were missing the really, really local stuff — the church notices, local tidbits, updates from community groups. I think it is important that people see faces they recognise whether that is local kids playing sport, kids at school or community members at work. It's important information for the community to share. It's that idea of a local newspaper as a means of people communicating with one another.'

Janelle works two days a week, producing anywhere from 12 to 16 pages although she says there's less to report during COVID with all local sport cancelled. She and Dorothy have had to come up with inventive ways to fill the pages. 'We decided



Local newspapers are the lifeblood of communities, sharing information about local sport, cultural events, and supporting local businesses.

to do a puzzle page which includes a Guyra crossword. We expected it to last just a couple of weeks. But it's taken off. People just love it. One woman sends it to her mother up in Queensland and they do it together, another sends it to her niece in America. So people are sharing it online with people who have moved away and they're all engaged in finding out the information together. It's really taken off.'

The Gazette is clearly filling a need and it has blossomed. It circulates across all 1685 householders in the 2365 postcode as well as in nearby towns of Armidale and Tingha.

Janelle says people really look forward to their weekly news and if they miss out on a copy they'll ring up to get one. 'And names are important – don't spell someone's name wrong or you will know it!'

The Gazette has an important place in the life and identity of the community. 'People will always tell us how much they enjoy it. One lady who lives in Armidale gets a copy every week and her daughter emailed to say that it's a been a lifeline for her mother and that without it she would be lost.'

Advertising and donations keep the paper going and local politicians and the council have been enthusiastic in their support. GALA also received a \$10,000 grant from Commonwealth's Public Interest News Gathering (PING) program and a grant from the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal will ensure the newspaper's continued production until at least the end of 2021.

Barraba inspired by Guyra Gazette

Two hours west in the town of Barraba, when the owners of the Barraba Gazette retired Community College Northern Inland (CCNI) stepped in and set up social enterprise and free weekly publication Barraba Community News. 'We were inspired and encouraged by what GALA does with the Guyra Gazette, but we are still on our trainer wheels,' Executive Officer Alison Heagney says.

Editor Bronwyn Clinch volunteered for the job and says it's been a steep learning curve for her and her team of volunteers — in proofreading, editing and desktop publishing. Luckily the retired owners of the Gazette were on hand to pass on their knowledge and contacts so those skills weren't lost to the community.

Bronwyn says she's learned just how vital a community paper is for informing and connecting people. 'People desperately want some form of community communication. They queue up outside the doors on Wednesday morning waiting for us to finish printing.'

As to the future, the challenge is finding a sustainable business model, and Bronwyn is looking to Guyra Gazette and the long running Walcha News to see what Barraba can learn from them.

The College plans to run a course in term 4 on writing, interviewing and taking photographs for newspapers to increase the pool of correspondents contributing local news.

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**Adult
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Victoria leads the way in adult literacy

A professional development program to improve adult literacy and numeracy teaching is underway across Victoria.



The Victorian Government’s vision for adult and community education identified a unique role for Learn Locals in helping Victorians to improve their literacy, numeracy and digital skills. But it recognised that teaching literacy is a specialist skill and that there is a shortage of teachers equipped to do the job.

The Adult Literacy and Numeracy Practitioner Program (ALNPP) which kicked off in July trains adult education teachers in how to build literacy and numeracy skills and integrate them into a range of different subjects in pre-accredited programs.

Nineteen highly skilled adult literacy and numeracy practitioners completed the ALNPP in stage 1 and are now mentoring around 260 adult education teachers working in Learn Locals across the state.

Using a web-based platform, all participants complete modules on theory, using frameworks, identifying requirements and innovative teaching. The platform includes a community of professional practice and online forum where participants attend expert workshops, meet to discuss the curriculum and its implications, interact with experts in the field and develop the confidence they need to improve their daily teaching.

Vanessa Watson works as a CGEA and EAL teacher at Bass Coast Adult Learning in Wonthaggi. She began her working life as a teacher and later retrained to teach literacy, then after a long stint in management and research she did TESOL training and works around 3 days a week teaching foundation skills.

‘I work in Wonthaggi which has one of the lowest literacy rates in Victoria and although we don’t really we know why, we do know it’s a generational problem. So if people are going to escape that poverty cycle we need to be teaching literacy at both ends — to children and parents — and I want

to be part of changing that. I’m passionate about low level literacy so when I heard about this training program I was like, “Pick me! Pick me! Pick me!”

‘So I was very, very excited when I was selected. It’s a course that’s directed straight at low level literacy and numeracy and I felt excited to be getting those skills and sharing them with colleagues. I also had the time to do it and I love learning. It’s my thing.

‘The course was just brilliant. It’s broken into four units that are really tailored to what we need to know. There’s no padding. It’s incredibly well put together with brilliant resources and research and examples and things that you can apply straight away.

‘I noticed a real change in my mindset after I did it. It had a lot of what I needed. It was fantastic for revising my understanding of A-Frames and the ACSF framework but it also challenged me about whether what we are providing at BCAL is what the community really needs or is it what we think they need.

‘We did a lot in the course about the idea of psychological safety and so that encouraged me to look at our physical environment. We run a reading course out of a building and there are people in our area who might be scared or put off by having to walk inside what looks like a school building if school was an unhappy experience for them. I love the idea of taking our classes out to where people gather. For example, running a reading resilience course at a local mum’s group or having mums writing books for their children as a way to engage them in literacy. The course changed how I look at things and shifted the emphasis to looking at our community in a more holistic way, and going out and meeting people where they are instead of expecting them to come to us. That’s been really exciting.

‘I’ve just finished the second phase of the project which involved me mentoring ten other people working in seven different Learn Locals in our geographic area. The response



Students at Learn Local providers like Pines Learning in Melbourne's north east will benefit from teacher training in literacy, numeracy and digital skills.

has been terrific. We met five times for Q & A sessions and to share stories and resources as they worked their way through the course.

'I was nervous at first. The first week was rather nerve-racking because I was working with these incredibly talented teachers who are amazing at what they do and had all sorts of wise advice to offer. But I got over it quickly. By the end of the second week I had relaxed and was really enjoying it. It was totally fantastic because we have established a new network of people in our geographic areas who are growing ideas together and it was really fun.

'As a mentor my role was making sure everyone is participating and putting in and sharing in the conversation and that worked really well. Everybody loved the online course.

'There is so much material you need to work through during the second, mentoring stage. The greatest delight for me was having to go back and do the course again. The second time round I got so much more out of it. It's resource rich, it's laid out so well and it's really accessible and easy to follow. And all the mentees said the same.

'Successful mentoring for me is all about facilitating connections and conversations and passing on your enthusiasm.

'I plan to do my Masters in adult education next year. I want to see changes in literacy rates in Wonthaggi and my research will help me work out how to do that.'

Dale Pobega works part time as an EAL teacher at Wyndham Community Education Centre in Melbourne's west and as a consultant. Dale was interested in doing the training because COVID and working from home provided the opportunity and because of his longstanding interest and involvement in online training.

'I also got involved because I thought it would be a good refresher for me. I think the concept of being a participant who is a mentor second time round is a great one.'

'I think what was useful for me going through the program was stepping back and reviewing stuff I already know. It gave me an opportunity to rethink a lot of my own positions. The other thing was that every module invited a guest participant, someone who can throw a different light on the material, so there's lots of different voices in the discussions.

'It's given me a fresh perspective and made me think very critically about what I do and why and that's a great thing.

'I think they've done a fantastic job developing the training program. I appreciate how much they put in. They were so responsive, and that kind of personal involvement and ability to set up relationships and great networking has really been invaluable.'

Dale says the mentoring role involves making it enjoyable for participants. 'You've got to engage people, bring the material alive or lose them. The discussion forum demonstrates how engaged the participants have been — it is huge, they are responding, reflecting, talking about their reading and writing fantastic stuff. I hope it will have a real impact on teaching too.

'That central facilitation role is a key one. I am fortunate in having a 'co-pilot' in my colleague, Meg Cotter who has been working in the field for a long time and has an excellent knowledge of all the key areas in the course. Meg and I are constantly bouncing ideas off one another. Two heads are better than one. And it is just going beautifully.

'The value of ALNPP is that it's economical and practical. It offers much needed short, structured, continuous, and time flexible upskilling. I think our traditional models of PD are tired and for the most part not very useful. If most ACE teachers, for instance, are working part time or casually the question is when do they get the opportunity to come together for face to face training? Most people are being squeezed by the demands of work and home. We need more programs like the ALNPP that can fit in with our busy work schedules and lives.'

Erin Crockett is ACFE co-ordinator responsible for pre-accredited training at Taskforce in Melbourne's south east.

'I found the ALLNP extremely helpful. It really helped me to look at strengthening and evaluating courses to fit in with Adult Community and Further Education (ACFE) Board's strategy.

'The ALLNP is going to improve the skills of our workforce and the reputation of pre-accredited training so that it is highly regarded and recognised within the education sector. For example, if someone has a Certificate in Hospitality from a Learn Local it is regarded as a big stepping stone into a Certificate 2 at TAFE.

'Every Learn Local is different so this training ensures a consistency and improves the quality of delivery.

'My role is designing and evaluating courses so this is where I found the ALLNP to be extremely helpful for assessing things like work readiness.

'Phase one of the ALLNP was very in depth and thorough, and more work than I expected. I got a lot out of it as a refresher. I encourage every ACFE trainer to do the course.

'The most useful thing for me was going over learning theories and applying them to the current curriculum design. I use that now in evaluating and supporting trainers and I'll ask "You know your objective and what you want to achieve but have you thought about doing it this way?"

'I've got 13 in my mentoring group from around 12 different organisations so it's a good representation. I've had very good feedback. It's a mixed group and there's a lot who have been teaching ESL and LLN for a while, as well as people who are new and less experienced. They are learning from each other.

'I'm not there to lecture on course content, I facilitate discussions. I help guide conversations, bring out examples and experiences and strategies in teaching LLN. A lot of them have mentioned how refreshing it is to go back to revisit things like different learning theories. It also brings ACFE requirements, A frames and processes together and ties everything in so people feel part of it. Everyone loves the resources, they are really high quality.'

'Being involved in the mentoring is really rewarding, there's so much positivity and seeing people excited and improving really shows the value of the course.'

The ALNPP was developed as a joint initiative between Adult Learning Australia and ACEVic who partnered to design and deliver the program for the Department of Education and Training on behalf of the Adult Community Further Education Board.



ALA Adult and Community Education Scan 2020

Our recently launched research report on ACE in Australia profiles the sector's programs, features and provider types. The scan outlines ACE program participants, outcomes and the policy areas they support.

This report builds on a framework for reporting on ACE education programs developed in previous ACE scans but completely replaces previous data with consistent time series data from two NCVER collections: Government-funded and Total VET.

ala.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Australian-ACE-Report-2020.pdf

You can find previous issues of Quest and individual stories for sharing on our website. ala.asn.au/stories

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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