

QUEST

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Out of the ashes

On a hot night in January 2016 when the wind began dropping big burnt leaves on Julie-Ann Ford's property in Yarloop WA, she took her horses and her children and drove to safety.

Like Julie-Ann, most residents of Yarloop had no official warning to leave. Many decided too late and were trapped in town sheltering in terror as a firestorm swept through. Three days later, two residents were dead, 70,000 hectares, an area almost as big as New York City, was burned, 160 homes were gone and the historic township was in ashes.

Julie-Ann is the manager of the town's Community Resource Centre (CRC). Before the fire, the CRC was located in a former hospital and supported the community by providing access to technology, education, information, resources and community services, often to the most vulnerable people in the community.

'We spent a lot of time helping people access MyGov on the computers. There are people who are years and years behind

'The work we do is so important and needed but it's often invisible to politicians and decision makers so this has really focussed attention on what we do.'

Julie-Ann Ford, manager, Yarloop CRC

when it comes to digital literacy. We also provided emergency relief like food vouchers and had a laundromat for people to do their washing. Back then, we didn't think of disaster preparedness or recovery training as part of our role at all.'

But after the fire Julie-Ann says, 'The CRC was so well known and so valued that everyone looked to us for answers.'

The CRC became the centre of recovery efforts to a devastated community – staff and volunteers cooked meals, set up makeshift showers, provided emergency relief and fuel vouchers, and practical support. For a few days after the fire, the CRC operated out of Julie-Ann's home, before being relocated to the town's sports pavilion.

New beginnings

After three years of temporary accommodation, the CRC has a new permanent home. WA Premier Mark McGowan's official opening of the building on the site of the former town hall on November 22 marked a milestone on Yarloop's long road to recovery.

For Julie-Ann, 'It was an emotional day. It gave me a sense of closure. It feels like we can stop putting our lives and our town on hold. Finally life can go back to normal.'

(Story continues on p. 3)

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Message from the CEO



We are not alone in our pursuit of an integrated approach to adult learning and education. ALA is part of a global movement for change whose time has come.

We are not alone in our pursuit of an integrated approach to adult learning and education. ALA is part of a global movement for change whose time has come.

On my recent visits to New Zealand and the Republic of Ireland, I visited national peak adult education bodies ACE Aotearoa and AONTAS, and noted how much we had in common, including the belief that if our populations are to thrive all tiers of government must:

- recognise adult learning and education beyond vocational skills
- commit to ongoing and sustainable funding
- invest in continuous professional development and best practice in teaching and learning that engages, supports and empowers adults
- acknowledge the social and economic benefits of adult learning and education across portfolios; e.g. in health and human services
- provide opportunities to advance the progress of adults at risk of educational disadvantage or those with special needs in order to support them to achieve their potential.

But most importantly, what's needed is a genuine learner-centred approach to adult learning and education that is focussed on those who have been systematically marginalised.

In both the Republic of Ireland and New Zealand their approach embeds strong cultural relevance and practice. At ACE Aotearoa, for example, they use a guiding framework that enables due recognition to the status of Māori as Tāngata whenua, and Tāngata Tiriti as citizens of a shared country. It is an approach that should be considered here as a step towards reducing disadvantage among Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

In Ireland, AONTAS has developed partnerships across borders with sister organisations in England, Wales and Scotland at a time of ongoing demographic, economic and societal changes that will only accelerate with or without Brexit.

In our own backyard, climate change is presenting us with enormous challenges. The bushfire season is off to a worryingly early start and our thoughts are with communities that have been devastated by fire. We urgently need to learn how to mitigate, adapt to and reduce the impact of climate change. ACE organisations across Australia are well placed to play an even greater role in this process.

After my travels, I was so pleased to return to Australia and attend the release of the Ministerial Statement on The Future of Adult Community Education in Victoria 2020–2025. This statement provides goals and measures to enact positive change to support the adult and community education sector to improve the quality of the lives of Victorians across the state. It recognises the role of ACE in reducing the impact of disadvantage and empowering adult learners to participate fully as members of the community.

It reaffirms that adult and community education is a well-established model of provision that is accessible, flexible, affordable, supportive and effective for engaging educationally disadvantaged groups. Victoria has seen the value of recognising the ACE sector and it's an approach we'd love to see adopted at a national level.

A strong ACE system is needed now more than ever as the pace of change in our world accelerates and we need to adapt to new and emerging economic, social, demographic and environmental pressures.

ACE has a vital role to play in strengthening and supporting us as individuals and communities as we move further into the 21st century.

Jenny Macaffer, CEO



Julie-Ann Ford (L) with Janice Bathurst chairperson of Yarloop Community Resource Centre. Photo: Bill Morrison

(story continued from p. 1)

Since the fire, Julie-Ann says attention has focussed on the crucial role community-based organisations like CRCs can play in disaster preparedness and community healing.

'I think the importance of the CRC network in small communities has really been highlighted over this time. For example, our Shire has relied heavily on our community connections because that's something they didn't have a lot of. Last year, CRCs like ours faced 50% state government funding cuts. But we had the WA premier down here cutting the ribbon on our new building, so I think there's a lot more understanding of and respect for the work CRCs do.'

The new building incorporates the historic facade of the town hall, which survived the fire, an important reminder of the town's past as a thriving mill town.

'We lost 160 homes and we lost all that history and heritage. You feel like you've lost your identity,' Julie-Ann says.

Julie-Ann says preventative community education is crucial. 'We need to put measures in place so people know what to do like having a muster point in town and making sure everyone is evacuated. Frequently people can't make good decisions at times like that, they are too stressed, so they look to leaders in the community who will tell them when it's time to go.'

When it comes to recovery, the CRC has been at the forefront of efforts to build a new sense of shared identity and improve community resilience. 'We set up regular morning teas to give people a chance to come together and to talk about their experiences of the fire. It was very healing.'

But with a third of residents having moved away, friendships have been lost. 'Rebuilding those community connections is still really hard. There's a lot of work to be done. We're going to go back to old fashioned ways of connecting people like casserole nights and barbecues to get people out of their houses and meeting their new neighbours.'

It's a long road back from such a devastating event but Julie-Ann is hopeful. 'This building gives us an amazing opportunity and there's a lot of excitement about it in town. As a town, I think we're looking at the positives, we've got a chance to recreate ourselves, give ourselves a new identity and not many places get the chance to do that.'

After the official ceremonies were over the CRC staff and supporters organised a special get-together of their own to celebrate their new home and their achievements.

'After the fire we had nothing in place to cope with that situation. The Department of Industry and Regional Development (DIRD) who funds us offered to put our contract on hold but we said 'no' we wanted to keep going. We were very grateful to DIRD because they changed our contract to allow us to offer recovery and support and referrals instead of our normal services because that's what the community desperately needed. It was a massive challenge to keep the CRC functioning. It's so great to come out the other end knowing that we kept our services and support for the community going the whole time, to help us all recover and build community resilience. It was a fantastic achievement and we're so proud.'

(Cover photo: Dept of Fire and Emergency Services, WA.)



'We have so much to offer. The Community Resource Centre is the 'go to' place and such an important part of Yarloop. People come to us for everything.' Julie-Ann Ford, manager, Yarloop CRC

Older and wiser drivers

A refresher course in driving skills is improving safety for seniors behind the wheel.



Fran Bruell got her driver's licence when she was 18. Now aged 71, she's joined a Wiser Driver class in the City of Stonnington in Melbourne's south east to refresh her knowledge.

'I haven't had any update since I was 18 so I thought it was about time to test myself,' Fran says. She's one of a growing number of older Victorians who are signing up for classes to improve their safety and confidence behind the wheel.

For people over 60, driving on our roads today can feel very different to when they first got their licence. Traffic is heavier, there are more alcohol and drug affected drivers on the road and some rules have changed.

'Some people come along because they are secretly worried about their driving. Others come along because of pressure from their families, or because they've earned demerit points,' Wiser Driver coordinator at Hawthorn Community House Dawn Harper says.

But the course is as much about myth busting as it is a refresher for road rules.

'Older drivers get a bad rap,' Dawn says. 'It's a fallacy that older people are more likely to have an accident. The reality is that they are statistically less likely to be involved in an accident than younger people. So it's important to stress that. And you can see that a lot of people breathe a sigh of relief

because they realise no one is trying to take their licence off them. That fear stops a lot of people seeking out educational opportunities. Once we establish that they are not more likely to cause an accident they can relax and are much more open to hearing and learning.'

But if the good news is that they are less likely to cause accidents, the bad news is that older drivers come off second best when they're involved in a crash. 'They are much more fragile. And if they drive older cars that don't have modern safety features, they are more at risk of being injured. So we offer some driving tips that improve their safety. For example, driving with their lights on so they are more visible, always making sure they can see the tyres of the car in front of them to allow for their slower reflexes.'

'On the other hand, we also want people to be aware that things do change as we get older. Our reaction times slow down, and certain medications can affect concentration or judgement. So it's a matter of raising people's awareness that things will change and what to do about that.'

It's never boring, says Dawn. 'Running the same course repeatedly you'd think that it would be like 'groundhog day'. But every course is so interesting. The people who come along are so engaged, some have never done a course or formal driver training before. Most have been driving for 30-60 years and when they got their licence all you had to do was drive round the block. Some people haven't revisited the road rules in fifty years, so doing that really helps them feel more confident about their driving.'

For others, doing the course helps them decide it's time to stop. 'Some say doing the course was a real eye opener and helped them realise they should no longer drive. That's a good outcome if people understand their limitations better. We support people to make informed choices based on the new information we offer.'

Despite their desire for independence and mobility, all older drivers come to a point where they might not want or be able

'We make sure our tutors are older people because the evidence shows that having peer tutors who can share similar experiences works. Participants are more open and don't feel condescended to when the facilitator is someone in their age range.' Dawn Harper, Wiser Driver coordinator



to drive so planning for that time, talking to family members about it and thinking about alternatives is important Dawn says. So is talking with their GP about what effect different medications might have on their driving.

Over four weeks, participants take part in interactive activities and discussions to help them absorb and test their skills and knowledge in an engaging way.

'We focus on developing open conversations and drawing out people's concerns so we can find out what people are fearful about and then address those fears. That's why the program is so successful.'

'Some people are nervous sitting in a class for first time ever in their lives. Most groups of people don't know each other. But once people start hearing other people's stories, the dynamic really changes. They are much more open and say things like, "My gosh that happened to me, I can relate to that!"'

Andrea Thorne signed up because she's driving more passengers these days with friends who no longer enjoy night driving and grandchildren who need running around.

'I wish I'd done the course earlier,' Andrea says. 'After one week I was more aware of changing the way I do things to drive more safely, like driving with my lights on. I drive to Gippsland quite a lot and usually I push on even when I'm tired before I

stop for coffee. Now I stop half an hour earlier. The course has been really valuable.'

The Wiser Driver refresher course, first developed in 1996 is sponsored and regularly reviewed by behavioural scientists at VicRoads – the agency responsible for licensing and road safety in Victoria.

'The program has been going for over 25 years and it's continually being evaluated and adapted and the feedback we get is awesome,' Dawn says.

Dawn and her six trainers travel across the state running the trademarked training in over 50 locations each year to classes as small as five or as big as 25 with participants aged anywhere between 55 and 95.



Wiser drivers John and Andrea feel more confident and safer behind the wheel.

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Better literacy better health

A three year study of Indigenous adult literacy program 'Yes I Can!' explores the impact of improved literacy on people's health.



Literacy for Life Foundation coordinator Mary Waites with students in the Brewarrina classroom. Photo: Justine Kerrigan/Blackfella Films

More than 40% of Indigenous adults have low English literacy with the figure as high as 70% in some remote areas. Low rates of adult literacy go hand in hand with poorer health and wellbeing not just in Australia but throughout the world.

So how have adult literacy programs for Indigenous Australians affected the health of the people who've taken part?

It's a question health sociologist Associate Professor Toni Schofield from the University of Sydney and a team of researchers led by Associate Professor Bob Boughton from the University of New England set out to answer in a three-year ARC funded project.

The researchers set out to evaluate the Literacy for Life Foundation (LFLF)'s 'Yes I Can!' campaign. Established in 2012 the campaign based on a Cuban mass teaching method aimed to lift adult literacy rates in the remote town of Wilcannia in western New South Wales. Since the success of the Wilcannia pilot, which boasts a retention rate four times higher than similar programs, the 'Yes I Can!' campaign has been rolled out in another seven remote communities as well as in suburban Sydney.

'Adult literacy is one of the strongest predictors of life expectancy, although this is not widely recognised, including by policy makers in Australia. Research on disparities in health in England, in the US, in the EU and in the countries of the global south shows that adult literacy is strongly associated with one's chances of living a longer or a shorter life,' Toni said.

'We know the sorts of changes that take place when people take control over their lives, including improved health. Our research suggests that adult literacy is a pathway to progressing Indigenous health and wellbeing in Australia.' Associate Professor Toni Schofield

The 'Yes I Can!' campaign begins with getting the community onboard and recruiting, then follows three months of literacy classes, and another two to three months for participants to consolidate their confidence and skills, doing work experience, visiting local employers and learning about local services. The aim is to establish a flourishing culture of literacy that will continue to improve the lives of individuals as well as the community.

'The Commonwealth has attempted to improve the health of Aboriginal people through an emphasis on financial factors with policies aimed at improving access to employment, school attendance and retention, and community safety and so on. However, adult literacy has never been identified as something in the lives of Aboriginal people that should be targeted.'

The researchers conducted a survey of over 200 people across seven communities who graduated and compared them to other people in those communities who struggled with literacy but did not participate in the campaign.

All graduates showed gains in literacy and early results show the program had a powerful impact on people's self-esteem and self-efficacy.

'Graduates are significantly more likely to feel confident in speaking up and having a say in their community. They are also more likely to participate in community organisations particularly their local land council. Non graduates on the other hand were far less likely to do this. At an individual level, people who participated in 'Yes I Can!' felt empowered.'

This finding was borne out in a series of wide-ranging interviews with graduates and facilitators (or teachers).

'Being a participant in the program gave people an extraordinary boost in self-esteem and confidence, which has also been noted internationally. But it has not been noted before in Australian Indigenous communities. It was resoundingly the case in these communities, and translated



Literacy for Life Foundation Collarenebri coordinator Katie Jasper assists student Sheila Adams. Photo: Adam Sharman.

into an increased sense of agency and preparedness to engage in new activities.

‘For example, a number of people went on to get their drivers licences. (Driving without a licence is a major source of criminal prosecution and reason for incarceration in Aboriginal communities.) Some people were able to use ATMs for the first time, they could use computers and their mobile phones to send messages and go online to get information from government websites. They could read their own mail for the first time. And they were three times more likely than non-participants to be enrolled in local TAFE courses for the first time.

‘We found that people who had been unemployed for a long time began to find work in a range of occupations such as cleaner, gardener, disability carer, council worker, project officer. Although the work was overwhelmingly part time, casual or contract work the more literate they were the more likely they were to be able to access employment’.

The implications of this finding go beyond individual benefits.



A student from Literacy for Life Foundation’s Campbelltown Campaign on a visit to a local Kindergarten to share books with children. Photo: Adam Sharman.

‘There’s significant literature that says more collective action by disadvantaged communities improves community health and wellbeing. And we saw that in our research. One community did a remarkable job in improving its aggregate wellbeing by establishing a bushfoods business. Initially it was set up by one of the campaign facilitators and her family, but many more people came on board so it became a collective community activity that benefited many more people than those involved in the adult literacy campaign.

‘Another example is a community who is working with a major peak body to establish a women’s health centre to provide services and resources for women and families in the face of high rates of domestic violence and ill health. It’s a great example of how improving the literacy of women is key because it influences everyone else in the community and in the family, because the kids will follow in her footsteps.’

The community-led adult literacy campaign contributes to building relationships and strengthening community, but also to active citizenship, Toni says.

‘Current steps for a parliamentary mechanism for Indigenous participation and a treaty will struggle if people are not literate. The democratic process goes beyond parliamentary instruments. It depends on the meaningful participation of constituencies which requires literacy as a minimum.’

‘The ‘Yes I Can!’ campaign is a great vehicle for promoting First Nations peoples’ self-determination but it needs solid resourcing. It needs to be linked with other sectors and connected with other agencies that can engage with graduates along pathways that open up rewarding and empowered lives.’

‘According to recent OECD research, every incremental improvement in adult literacy goes hand in hand with incremental improvements in health.’ Associate Professor Toni Schofield

A vision for adult and community education



Victorian Minister for Training and Skills and Minister for Higher Education Gayle Tierney talks to *Quest* about her Government's new Ministerial Statement that outlines a bold vision for The Future of Adult Community Education in Victoria 2020–25.



The Hon. Gayle Tierney, MP.

Q: How and why did the Ministerial Statement come about?

The Ministerial Statement came about following extensive consultation with the ACE sector, including sector peaks, ACE providers, the ACFE Board and unions. The Statement is very much a bottom-up document – its content has come about in partnership with the ACE sector. This is something we should all be incredibly proud of.

Q: Why is a Ministerial Statement important in your view? Why now?

The community education sector plays a vital role in our education system but it has not been given the credit it deserves.

The Ministerial Statement on the Future of Adult Community Education in Victoria is a peg in the ground. It represents a significant step on our journey together towards a truly connected post-secondary education system in Victoria. It will produce a system in which adult community education stands alongside the Victorian Education and Training sector and universities as one of three pillars of this state's post-secondary education system.

I see the Statement as crucial at a time when we're focussed on a much more integrated post-secondary system. The Statement gives the sector a key purpose and presence in that system.

Q: Can you give us an overview of plans for the ACE sector and how these fit with your Government's policy on TAFE?

The Statement outlines opportunities to form stronger relationships across our post-secondary education system. In particular, the statement sets out the crucial importance of TAFEs and ACE providers working together to provide pathways between the different elements of the post-secondary system.

Importantly, the Statement also sets out an expectation that dual sector universities work cooperatively with the adult community education sector to raise learner aspirations and remove barriers to pathways to a university education.

The Statement absolutely complements our policy on TAFE. The Statement provides a framework to ensure all Victorians who go to TAFE have the skills necessary to succeed. It ensures that TAFE is an option for students who participate in Adult Community Education. It also puts a requirement on TAFEs to refer students to Adult Community Education when they need additional support to succeed.

Q: What changes can ACE organisations and the education sector in Victoria expect to see?

The Statement puts forward the framework for the future of Adult Community Education over the next five years. The ACFE Board will have responsibility for implementation, which they will do hand-in-hand with the sector.

I expect to see an ACE sector that is even more focussed on supporting learners on a needs basis. This is about ensuring that ACE providers are entirely focussed on supporting learners who most need ACE provision in order to develop the skills for work, further study, and to participate in society.

I also expect the Statement to bring about a much greater focus on partnerships with employers, more opportunities for ACE teachers to access professional development, and capacity building for ACE providers to take a lead role in literacy, numeracy, employability and digital skills provision.

In terms of TAFE/ACE partnerships, last month the Andrews Labor Government announced \$500,000 in funding for the Adult Community and Further Education Board to implement a partnership with TAFE. The first pilots will involve Chisholm and the Sunraysia Institute of TAFE. The funding will go to Learn Locals to trial different ways to help Free TAFE students succeed in their course. This will include new study resources; literacy, numeracy, employability and digital skills training; and scaffolding support such as in learning how to learn.

Q: What impact do you see these kinds of collaborations having on adult learners in Victoria?

There are a number of TAFEs and ACE providers who have begun working in partnership to improve learning and pathways for students. Many of these local early initiatives aim to improve course referrals between TAFEs and ACE providers to develop more flexible training delivery locations, to share teaching and learning resources, and to promote opportunities for shared professional development.

We see some great examples of this, such as a wonderful partnership between Kew Neighbourhood Learning Centre and Swinburne. This has had fantastic impacts, with students moving seamlessly through the post-secondary system.

Q: What do you see as the major challenges for the ACE sector in the state and how is the Government helping to address these?

Undoubtedly, the Ministerial Statement is ambitious. It sets significant goals for the sector which will take a lot of work to achieve. This is exciting, but requires the ACE sector to unite in order to meet the needs of learners and communities.

In terms of major challenges, the sector needs to build better brand recognition so that those who most need ACE know that it exists and can access it. The sector has also got the important challenge of capacity building in order to take a lead role in literacy, numeracy, employability and digital skills.

The Statement acknowledges each of these challenges, and has committed to tackling them head on. It is important to note that initiatives such as the \$500k TAFE/Learn Local partnership, and the extra \$5m for literacy and numeracy are both crucial in tackling the challenges that the ACE sector will face as we realise the Ministerial Statement.

Q: ACE is often overlooked in public discussions of post-secondary education. Why is it do you think that it has managed to overcome its 'Cinderella' status in Victoria?

It is in Victoria's DNA to have such an outstanding ACE sector. Victoria is a place where inclusion has long been at the heart of government policy, and I think this has played an important role in the success of the sector.

It should also be noted that Victoria is the beneficiary of an absolute champion in the late Lynne Kosky, who drove a significant focus on ACE when she was Minister for Training and Skills. As a state, we should be incredibly proud of Lynne's work, which has given Victoria the edge as a leader of ACE.

The Ministerial Statement seeks to build on what works well in terms of ACE in Victoria, and to strengthen it into the future.

Q: What is the relationship between the recently announced Macklin Review and the Government's objectives for the Ministerial Statement?

The Macklin Review is the next stage of this Government's work to deliver on our unwavering ambition for our post-secondary system. A system that is best attuned to Victoria's economic needs while also bringing about a fairer and more inclusive society. A system that is accessible to all Victorians, regardless of their background.

The Statement will greatly inform the review and I am confident both will further cement the fundamental role of Adult Community Education in Victoria's post secondary education and training system. The sector is a key part of the Terms of Reference for this review, and I hope the sector will

actively engage with the process to bring about a stronger education and training system.

Q: What have you learned about the sector on your visits to providers around the state?

Learn Locals are profoundly life changing. I have made it a core priority to visit ACE providers across the state. I always see how Learn Locals play a pivotal role in giving Victorians the literacy, numeracy and digital skills they need to get back into education and training. Through Learn Locals, people gain confidence, forge meaningful connections with others and feel valued for their contributions to their communities.

What really strikes me on these visits is that Learn Locals also give Victorians valuable life skills.

Learning how to read public transport timetables, fill in online forms or how to vote on election days, for example, changes and empowers lives. For example, at Djerriwarrh Community and Education Services, people are improving their reading, writing and digital skills through the English For Computers pre-accredited program. One of the participants is Nyakier who has now learned to use Medicare online, and is thrilled that she can submit her child's school absences using an online form.

Maria Peters, Chair of the Adult, Community and Further Education (ACFE) Board talks to Quest about the challenges and opportunities of putting the Ministerial Statement into practice.



Maria Peters Chair of the Adult, Community and Further Education (ACFE) Board.

Q: You described the implementation of the Ministerial Statement as exciting. Why? What do you see as the biggest challenge for the Board?

This is an exciting time for the Adult Community Education sector as it is being recognised for the work and impact it has every day across Victoria and for being an important part of the post-secondary system in this state. This Statement on the Adult Community Education sector is as an integral part of the Minister's educational vision and approach to education and training in this state. The Board is excited because of the opportunities it provides our learners and people. It will guide our decision making and enable us to be bold as we work with the sector to best position it for learners, communities and industry.

The ACFE Board's Strategy for 2020–25 is aligned with the Ministerial Statement and will be the means to implement it over the period.

The ACFE Board as leaders will implement the Ministerial Statement and will prioritise the Ministerial Statement in its core work.

The expectations on the Board as the leader of the sector pose some challenges given current resources. However, we are confident of addressing this into the future and therefore we see implementing the Ministerial Statement as a great opportunity; one that provides hope and clarity of our role as a sector and as a Board on behalf of the learners we care about and are stewards of.

Q: You described the Ministerial Statement as ‘a turning point’ for ACE in Victoria. How do you see things changing for ACE and for adult learners as a result?

This is a turning point and new era for Adult Community Education in Victoria because the sector is being recognised as one of three pillars in the post-secondary system through a Statement that values the very real and often unknown and measurable impact it has on Victorians every day. The Board will lead the implementation of the Ministerial Statement and Adult Community Education in Victoria, raising its profile and worth across the whole education and training system. The ACFE Board will continue to be proud stewards of the sector. If we do our job, which we can only do together with a united sector and strong departmental support and work, we will then effectively be able to implement the Victorian Government’s goals and aspirations for Adult Community Education which in turn will greatly benefit adult learners. The statement clarifies and strengthens the roles of the sector which will in turn provide greater opportunities and access to learners who need it most.

Q: You said that making a meaningful difference that gives people hope is what counts. How will the implementation of the Statement give Victorians hope?

The implementation of the Ministerial Statement will give Victorians hope because it more firmly places learners at the centre of our work. The Statement acknowledges the crucial role that the Adult Community Education sector plays in Victoria. We are known for making a difference but now we can play an even greater role in that by having broader roles that acknowledge the sector’s expertise in supporting and developing the most disadvantaged members across Victoria. That role is focussed on the learner, on helping individuals in our communities who need to build the confidence and their education capacity and skills to have positive futures in study, in work and in life.

Q: You said at the launch that ‘all of us will have to get better at working together’. What might be involved in making this happen?

Working in partnership is critical to delivering on the Ministerial Statement’s goals and aspirations. The Board’s capacity will need to be strengthened to ensure it is able to achieve this Statement’s ambitions for the sector. The work of the Board will be underpinned by quality and effective support from the Department, strong work and support from our people and building strong partnerships across our communities. These need to be based on what is best for the learner first and foremost, then using our collective expertise and knowledge of community and industry need to get the best outcomes for all. This will require us all to be better at working together and in different ways for the benefit of adult learners who, as we know, face a range of challenges, not just in their education. Government departments, services and agencies will all need to work together collaboratively focussing on the learners.

Q: One of the goals of the Ministerial Statement is for government departments to understand the value and work collaboratively with the ACE sector. How will the Board achieve this goal?

The ACFE Board’s Strategy for 2020-25 will include high-level measures that align with the Ministerial Statement and therefore link achievement of all aspects of the Ministerial Statement and the Strategy. Other government departments have a role to play to increase our reach to their clients, to enhance resourcing and support and address specific learner needs.

One of the Board’s major projects is to increase the promotion of the brand and value of Adult Community Education to stakeholders, including government departments, and the broader community. A greater recognition of the value of Adult Community Education will improve the provision of place-based needs based Adult Community Education for those adult learners who need it the most so we can play a role in transforming their lives.

Q: How have your experiences working in adult education shaped your perspective? Have you had a lifelong learner in your own life who has inspired you?

My working life has been strongly aligned to the core values and purpose of the Adult Community Education sector and the difference it makes to so many Victorians every day.

My dedication to educationally disadvantaged learners began as an adult language, literacy and numeracy teacher, an experience that shaped my life and passion for education. My commitment, priority and passion remain in the sector and working with our wonderful Learn Local providers and other stakeholders to do the best for our learners.

I have taught many of the students that have come through the doors of Learn Local providers and over the years taught many students who had given up hope that they could engage in education and achieve what their heart desired – disengaged youth, adults who couldn’t read or write well, if at all, people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds – many of whom did not have a belief or capacity to engage in education and have the benefits this brings. Adult community-based education changes that picture for so many and is often a meaningful springboard to new opportunities as well as giving individuals a better sense of themselves and what they can do. I feel proud to have played a part in so many learners’ lives who needed the opportunities that ACE offers.

The stories of the students I taught in the past, and now those that I meet across the sector is what matters, as they epitomise the benefits of a lifelong learning journey. I had that inspiration from one of my teachers in secondary school and I like to think and hope that I have carried that ethos into my roles as an educator and as a leader. That is what we stand for at ACFE and that’s why I believe in its importance and in ensuring it has a strong future.



The annual Learn Local Awards in Victoria celebrate the achievements of adult community education in the state.

ACE news from around Australia



Photo: Janine Sheen

In **WA**, Linkwest's 'People.Place.Partnerships' conference attracted over 200 people from Neighbourhood and Community Resource Centres across the state. The three-day program included keynotes, workshops, a panel discussion, plenty of opportunity for formal and informal networking and Linkwest's 21st award ceremony. In October, in partnership with the Jeder Institute, Linkwest ran a 2 day 'Art of Participatory Community Building' workshop to build the skills and expertise of the network in community-led development and participatory leadership. linkwest.asn.au

In **VIC**, ACEVic, the peak policy, advocacy and information body for the state's adult community education sector representing Victoria's Learn Local (LL) organisations, has launched a new members page on their website incorporating professional development and funding opportunities, resources, discounts and helpful links. To foster collaboration and networking, ACEVic has introduced 'LLO Road Trips' and executive exchanges. acevic.org.au

Neighbourhood Houses Victoria held a successful AGM, published their annual report and are planning their annual conference in March. nhvic.org.au

In **SA**, Community Centres SA (CCSA) in partnership with Volunteering SA&NT ran the 'Being Connected – Improving Social Isolation & Building Healthy Communities' conference on the 31st October at the Hilton Adelaide and attracted a record number of registrations.

As the peak body commissioned by the Department for Innovation and Skills to deliver the Adult Community Education (ACE) Sector and Workforce Development Plan, CCSA has been undertaking a sector-wide engagement process with stakeholders.

This includes the release of two major surveys to gather input; conducting consultations and regional forums with ACE providers, RTOs, other relevant providers and ACE participants; and scoping new partnerships for regional-specific initiatives to develop adult community education pathways to further training, skilling and employment. communitycentres.sa.asn.au

In **NSW**, at their November conference, CCA announced Carmen Kentwell from ATWEA College Newcastle as Student of the Year. Carmel a single mother of three has overcome serious challenges and hardship to successfully undertake adult education to make a better life for herself and her family. cca.edu.au

In **TAS**, Neighbourhood Houses Tasmania have been assisting members to apply for Adult Learning Program funding, which is targeted at people 15 years and over who are looking for work and people who are long-term unemployed.

Tracey Tasker, CEO says the funding would allow Houses to get involved in a number of ways to support unemployed people in their communities, such as providing work placements or helping to develop study skills. nht.org.au



CCSA's Kylie Ferguson with award from Planning Institute of Australia.



CCSA's conference attracted a record number of participants.



NSW Skills & Higher Education Minister Dr Geoff Lee (centre) with CCA Chair David Fuller and Treasurer Theresa Collignon.

ACE update (cont.)

In the **ACT**, the ANU Centre for Continuing Education (CCE) celebrated its 50th anniversary.

CCE was formed after the Department of Adult Education was renamed in 1969 and its first Director was Dr Chris Duke. The Centre's original objectives were to provide education to adults to further their knowledge in fields in which they worked or had a general interest and those aims of fostering lifelong learning continue today. In 2019 nearly 2,000 people participated in a range of CCE classes from art and astronomy to literature and life skills run by an active pool of 50 teaching staff. Professional development courses are very popular with writing skills and leadership development particularly sought after by government employees taking on new roles. To celebrate its 50th anniversary, CCE has established a competition for current students and will award travel prizes worth \$6000. cce.anu.edu.au

In **QLD**, Jobs Queensland have released 'Future Work, Future Jobs' a report that looks into the job market of 2030, and finds that people will need to constantly update and develop new skills to match new careers. The report concludes that lifelong learning will be the norm and proposes a model of 'learner accounts' adopted in countries such as Singapore where money to be used for approved training is credited into people's accounts and is topped up over their lifetime so people can continue to take courses at any age and stage of life. jobsqueensland.qld.gov.au/projects/future-of-work/



Nationally, ALA is pleased to represent adult and community education as a member of the Commonwealth's VET Stakeholder Panel, a committee of 19 organisations including industry groups and peak bodies established to help drive reform of the Vocational Education and Training system. Given the number of adult community education providers across Australia providing VET and the sector's strong track record with VET students, ALA is keen to ensure that ACE perspectives and expertise are recognised and incorporated in the development of the new system.

With the end of year looming ALA is also busy evaluating activities and setting its priorities for 2020 for professional development and advocacy. Also on the agenda for the new year are plans ALA's 60th birthday celebrations including the launch of an official history that celebrates ALA's role as the only and oldest national peak body for adult education in Australia.

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



Art class with Canberra artist Noel Ford 1999. Photo: The Australian National University

MarionLife Community Services won CCSA's Loneliness Cure Awards.

Celebrating the 21st LinkWest Awards Alicia Curtis (L) and life member Pamela Barrett.

QUEST

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