



MEDIA RELEASE

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Celebrate Adult Learners Week: *Take the Journey* 1-8 September 2024

[Adult Learners Week](#) is back from 1 to 8 September 2024, inviting Australians to *Take the Journey* into adult education. This annual UNESCO event, coordinated by [Adult Learning Australia](#) and supported by the Commonwealth Government, highlights the transformative power of lifelong learning and the diverse educational pathways available to adults across the nation.

Kathleen Priestly - President of Adult Learning Australia, emphasises that "Adult Learners Week showcases the journey anyone can take through adult education, regardless of age or life stage. It's about developing skills, connecting with others and gaining the confidence to participate fully in local communities."

Adult Learners Week celebrates all forms of learning, from formal education to informal experiences. It aims to connect individuals with community education providers, fostering skills and confidence that benefit both personal wellbeing and community participation.

"Adult learning is for everyone," says Ms. Priestly, "including those hesitant about re-engaging with education. Learning can help people overcome barriers created by not being able to read or write, use technology, or speak or write English. The life transforming outcomes can range from increased work satisfaction to managing necessities like understanding medication labels and simple joys such as reading bedtime stories to your children."

The importance of adult learning is underscored by the following statistics. In Australia today

- 44% of adult Australians aged 15-74 have very low literacy skills and 54% have very low numeracy skills¹
- 9.4% of Australians remain highly digitally excluded with the digital gap notably wider between First Nations and non-First Nations people, especially in remote areas²
- At a time when the workplace requires people to be better qualified, the number of young Australians leaving school without completing year 12 is on the rise with 1 in 5 young people leaving school early.³

¹ [Senate Inquiry into Adult Literacy and its importance 2021](#)

² [Australian Digital Inclusion Index](#)

³ [School retention rates](#)

However, progress is being made:

- In 2023, over 1 million students were enrolled in government-funded vocational education and training⁴
- 42% of Australians aged 15-74 participated in some form of learning in 2020-21⁵
- 80% of people with non-school qualifications are employed, compared to 58% without.⁶

Adult Learners Week will feature inspiring stories* of adult learners who have transformed their lives through education. They include:

Emma Griggs – New South Wales

Emma, a proud Wiradjuri woman overcame homelessness and educational challenges to transform her life. After securing a role in the NSW Police Force, she pursued further education, earning diplomas in Counselling and Mental Health. Now 45, Emma teaches Community Services and Applied Aboriginal Studies, empowering others in her community through her own journey of resilience and determination.

Melanie Cameron – Queensland

Melanie, a 22-year-old is dedicated to self-improvement despite facing intellectual impairment. With help from her support worker, she has engaged in adult literacy classes at Kawana Library, enhancing her reading and social skills. Melanie's commitment to learning extends to volunteering, as she aims to seize more opportunities in the future.

Christiana Davies – South Australia

Christiana, a refugee from Sierra Leone, has navigated numerous barriers to achieve her educational goals in Australia. She built her foundation through the Australian Migrant English Program and is now completing her postgraduate degree in mental health nursing while working in the field. As a leader in her community, she serves as Chairperson of the African Women's Foundation for South Australia, demonstrating her commitment to mentorship.

Kerry Hume – Victoria

Kerry Hume, a 40-year-old mother of three began her farming career two years ago and has since pursued various agricultural courses. Her dedication has led to her role as Assistant Manager at Aurora Dairies and recognition in the Great South West Dairy Awards. Kerry appreciates the supportive adult learning environment, which has enhanced her skills and opened new opportunities.

Tim Royle – Western Australia

Tim, 37, has struggled with literacy due to dyslexia but has pursued improvement through a mature-age apprenticeship and work as a prison officer. After seeking help from Read Write Now, he is dedicated to enhancing his reading and writing skills to advance in his career. Tim's journey reflects

⁴ [Total VET students and courses 2022](#)

⁵ [Work-Related Training and Adult Learning, Australia](#)

⁶ [Labour force explained](#)

his resilience and commitment to lifelong learning and he hopes his story inspires others to do the same.

Mick Curtis – Tasmania

Mick Curtis, originally from South Australia, began his working life in abattoirs and faced challenges with literacy. At 48, he accepted an opportunity from his employer to improve his skills through classes at the Geeveston Community Centre. With support from 26Ten, Mick has made significant progress and aims to become a supervisor in the future.

These are just a few of the many inspiring stories of adults who have transformed their lives through embarking on new learning experiences.

ADULT LEARNERS WEEK - BACKGROUND

Adult Learners Week is coordinated by [Adult Learning Australia](#), the national peak body for adult and community education. It is a UNESCO initiative supported in Australia by the Commonwealth Government and run each year in the first week of September.

Hundreds of events and activities are held around Australia and online to promote the benefits of adult education and lifelong learning.

Any adult education and training organisation can get involved in Adult Learners Week including neighbourhood houses, community centres, libraries, training organisations, local governments, Aboriginal learning cooperatives, employers, not-for-profit organisations, workplaces, men's or women's sheds, U3As, community colleges, TAFE colleges and universities.

Every year, scholarships are awarded to outstanding adult learners to enable them to continue learning either by taking a new learning pathway or continue an existing one. Adult learning providers are invited to nominate adult learners who are changing the trajectory of their lives through adult learning.

MEDIA INTERVIEW OPPORTUNITIES & CONTACT

The following are available for interview:

- Kathleen Priestly - President of Adult Learning Australia (TAS)
- Professor Annette Foley - Vice President of Adult Learning Australia (Vic)
- Jenny Macaffer - CEO of Adult Learning Australia (Vic)
- **Adult learners from around Australia – please see attachment**

To arrange an interview, or for further information, please contact Margot Gorski on 0412 393 394 or at margot@prmatters.com.au.

***See attachment for a full list of Adult Learners available for interview.**