



MINISTERS' MEDIA CENTRE

Ministers of the Employment and Workplace Relations
Portfolio

Speech

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Adult Learners Week

The Hon Andrew Giles MP
Minister for Skills and Training

Before I begin, I would like to thank Kamellia and Mark for their warm welcome to country.

I would also like to respectfully acknowledge that the land in which we meet on today is the traditional lands of the Kurna people and pay my respect to their elders past and present.

I extend that respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people here today.

I want to acknowledge Blair Boyer, South Australian Minister for Skills and Training and Jenny Macaffer, Chief Executive Officer of Adult Learning Australia.

First, let me acknowledge the critical role of Adult Learning Australia as a national voice for adult learning and community education.

Your advocacy is invaluable to people who wish to re-enter or further their education.

Your work is helping to overcome disadvantage in our communities, empowering people to access to pathways to extend their knowledge and skills.

Simply put – your work is changing lives.

We know that when people apply their new knowledge and skills, they often experience a shift in how they view themselves.

It gives them the confidence to engage in their community.

And equips them to better adapt to changes.

And from the many adult learners I've met over the years – they're proud about these new skills. Who wouldn't be?

We know that in 2023, over 1 million students were enrolled in government-funded vocational education and training.

People need access to learning opportunities at every stage of their lives- to build skills and knowledge, to fulfil their aspirations and to contribute to their communities.

The Australian Government recognises it's a fundamental right.

And we are with you every step of the way.

Adult Learners Week is a great opportunity to spotlight the benefits and transformative nature of lifelong learning.

For the last 29 years, Australia has supported this UNESCO initiative.

It celebrates all forms of adult learning, from formal to informal.

It showcases the creative, fun and practical learning opportunities available in communities across the country.

It aims to inspire people to learn, no matter their age, background or educational history.

Adult Learners Week encourages adults to engage or re-engage in learning.

In particular, we want to encourage those who have previously struggled in formal or traditional educational settings.

This week raises awareness of the benefits of adult learning and education.

It emphasises the power of education to reshape lives and unlock new possibilities.

This year's theme - 'Take the journey' - emphasises the journey anyone can take through adult education, regardless of age or life stage.

Anyone can start or restart a learning journey.

We know the benefits of adult learning go beyond skills acquisition, including meeting new people, feeling a sense of belonging and achievement, and discovering new self-confidence.

Going on a learning journey as an adult can help adapt to today's challenges, particularly with the changing nature of work and rapidly changing technology.

The Albanese Government supports investment in foundational skills training, and for good reason.

According to the OECD, three million Australian adults, or one in five of us, have low literacy and/or numeracy skills.

These are fundamental skills.

These are skills that help open doors to better jobs, and further training or studies.

These are skills that boost people's confidence to engage with their community.

These are skills that parents can pass on to their children, supporting their own learning journey.

In short, these are life skills.

We are committed to supporting adults across the nation to get and enhance these foundation skills.

We're shaping foundation skills policy and program delivery through the National Skills Agreement and the Skills for Education and Employment Program.

The landmark 5-year National Skills Agreement includes a commitment to deliver a 10-year foundation skills strategy, and \$142 million in dedicated additional investment.

This includes \$77.27 million for states and territories to support the Adult and Community Education sector.

This funding recognises the sector's key role in supporting the most disadvantaged Australians who may find it difficult to engage with mainstream education.

And, as the new Minister for Skills and Training, I am keen to work with my state and territory colleagues to bring to life this commitment to foundation skills.

You're also all keenly aware of the SEE program.

SEE provides free English language, literacy, numeracy and digital skills assessment and training across Australia.

From 1 July 2024, the Albanese Government broadened the SEE Program to meet the diverse needs of participants, and because we believe it is our job to make it easier – not harder - for Australians to get the help they need when it comes to Foundation Skills.

That's why we expanded eligibility by removing the requirement to be a registered job seeker.

SEE is now open to all Australians aged over 15 and who have left school.

SEE is about creating access for all – with no wrong door.

This change means it's easier for millions of working Australians to access the training they need.

We have also introduced non-accredited training to complement accredited training delivery.

This approach allows us to better meet the diverse training needs of participants.

And we have introduced a second stream of specific place-based First Nations-led training for First Nations people.

These changes, among others, reflect our commitment to providing comprehensive support to help individuals overcome barriers to learning and employment.

This is about making sure no one is held back and no one is left behind.

It is my honour to be able to announce today the three Adult Learners Week scholarship winners.

These scholarships are awarded to outstanding adult learners to enable them to continue their learning journey.

Today's scholarship winners are learners whose commitment and motivation make them stand out, and whose learning journey has made a big difference in their lives.

They have overcome significant barriers to get started or faced challenges in continuing to learn.

Nominations are received from across the adult education sector and nominees are from all walks of life.

For 2024, there were a record 26 scholarship applications.

First, I'd like to congratulate John Lindsay.

John Lindsay, a 61-year-old River Ngarrindjeri man, returned to education here at Tauondi Aboriginal College, where he is pursuing a Certificate I in Access to Vocational Pathways.

As a respected mentor, John inspires others to embrace education and personal growth at any age.

John, it was great to hear you tell your personal story as part of this launch event. Please welcome John to the stage.

Our next winner is Kirsty Marshall from Victoria.

Kirsty joined the Brotherhood of St Lawrence's 'Sustaining Economic Empowerment and Dignity for Women' program.

She's now engaged in a six-month certificate course after graduating from the program.

We have two equal runners-up.

Tahnee Baker (NSW) and Jypsey-Lee Banfield-Paterson (NT).

Tahnee has overcome significant challenges – including a stroke - to complete her Certificate III in Business at Tamworth Community College.

While Jypsey-Lee from the Batchelor Institute in the NT is studying her community services certificate while juggling a young daughter, building a future for her family.

I'd like to extend my congratulation to all the 2024 Adult Learners Week scholarship nominees on their determination and willingness to share their journey to inspire others.

Please join me in a round of applause for these outstanding examples of lifelong learning.

Today is about celebrating the inspiring stories of adult learners who have transformed their lives through education.

And that includes the scholarship winners today.

These are fantastic stories that the whole of Australia needs to hear.

We want people to be confident to take up adult learning.

It's good for our economy and strengthens our community connections.

And it will transform lives.

Thank you.