

Literacy and the International Year of Volunteers

There's more than one way to skin a cat might be Australia's national motto. In a federal system such as ours, each state goes about its business in its own particular way.

One of the useful things about national organisations such as ACAL is that they provide a way for people from different states to come together and compare notes. There are contributions from every state in this issue of *Literacy Link*; each deals with volunteer literacy tutors.

It is clear there is no agreement on whether volunteer literacy programs are a good thing. In some states they are well supported by policy, in others they are threatened by various initiatives. In some states volunteers seem to be almost forgotten by government systems.



Volunteer tutors, and their students and families enjoy a multicultural picnic in Perth WA (see page 3)

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Marcia Barclay (page 3) asserts that, 'Volunteer tutors were the backbone of adult literacy in its early days in Australia.' and asks, 'So what caused the demise of volunteer tutor programs and where have all the volunteer tutors gone?'

More than one contributor points to the literacy profession's historical antipathy towards volunteers. They were seen as 'untrained do-gooders', as 'exploited' and put into the category 'neither fish nor fowl'.

However, times have changed and Australian society has moved on; Ann Brown makes the a crucial point in her article (page 7) 'Once the average tutor would have been either a retired person or someone (with) spare time. . . more often today's tutors are unemployed . . . volunteering (is now) an approved activity by CentreLink.'

2001, the International Year of Volunteers, is the right time for ACAL to re-examine its views on volunteer tutoring and to work to connect volunteers, both with each other and with literacy professionals.



SA volunteers in community education literacy programs

by Jan Peterson

Currently, volunteers are involved in the direct delivery of learning programs in 72% of programs funded by the Adult Community Education Council. Their responsibilities vary. Volunteer tutors may:

- Be responsible for planning and delivering individual learning programs for adults
- Deliver learning activities to adult learners on learning programs planned by a paid educator
- Assist a paid educator in classroom activities by helping to provide individualised attention
- Assist a paid educator in a language class by providing assistance to those with very limited English skills in a mixed group
- Facilitate conversation groups for English language learners.

Tutor training

It has been difficult for tutors to access ongoing training to meet the constant demand and high turnover of volunteer staff. An average of two training courses have been available each year since 1995, funded through program funds from the Adult Community Education Council. Two different courses are available:

- *Good Practice for Adult Literacy Tutors* —an accredited course that has been adapted from a course designed in WA and which for a time was an elective in a Certificate course in Community Services.

- *English as a Second Language Training for Tutors*

—an accredited course designed for the Home Tutor Scheme in South Australia and aligned to the Certificate 1 in Workplace Training.

However, many people who volunteer their services do not wish to complete an accredited course. They may receive informal, on-the-job training and work under supervision.

Volunteers in 2001

This year there are a number of activities planned for volunteers:

1. Tutor training modules will be offered during the course of the year, in response to requests by providers that some training be available for volunteers each term. The modules will be offered as both accredited and non-accredited training. The training will be accessed through the L&N Professional Development Project and its Project Officer, Tess Were.

- Term One: Reading
- Term Two: Adults with disabilities

2. This year the theme for the South Australian ACE Conference will be around the International Year of the Volunteer. It will be held on Thursday 29 March 2001, at Fullarton Park Centre. Details for registration will soon be available on the Professional Development website: www.literacy.sa.edu.au

Jan Peterson

Adult Community Education Unit



ACAL in collaboration with QCAL presents the
NATIONAL CONFERENCE
1—3 November 2001, Surfers Paradise, Queensland

CALL FOR PRESENTATION PROPOSALS

2001, the beginning of a new millennium, is an appropriate time to reflect on past policies and practices and plan for a new future.

In keeping with the conference theme of 2001, *A Literacy Odyssey*, we are inviting presentations that

- critique past policies and practices to identify possible ways forward;
- identify new and emerging literacies and issues which have implications for policy and practice;
- exemplify detailed current practices that work;
- provide for participants to have a voice.

Formats for the presentations include:

- individual papers (40 minutes)
- workshops (85 minutes)
- panels of up to four speakers (85 minutes).

The conference is designed to cater to the needs of teachers of LANT and community literacy/numeracy courses, vocational and workplace trainers, high school teachers who are developing courses oriented to vocational and life competencies, researchers in adult literacy/numeracy, managers and policy makers.

Glynda Hull, who is a professor at Berkeley University, USA, a specialist in adult literacy for many years has agreed to be a keynote speaker at the conference.

Proposals of fewer than 200 words are required by 1 April 2001.
Email: R.Roebuck@mailbox.gu.edu.au
Fax: R.Roebuck
ACAL/QCAL conference organiser -
(07) 3875 6868

Papers for refereeing are required by 31 August 2001.

Literacy and volunteers in WA—exploitation or dedication?

by Marcia Barclay

In *Literacy Link* (August 2000) the question 'Is Volunteer Literacy Tutoring likely to rise again?' was put to Rosie Wickert. She pointed out we would be an arrogant bunch if we thought only professional teachers could teach adult literacy and numeracy. This response has provided the opportunity to revisit the notion of volunteer tutors.

Volunteer tutors were the backbone of adult literacy in its early days in Australia. So what caused the demise of volunteer tutor programs and where have all the volunteer tutors gone?

Volunteer tutoring has been attacked on many fronts with claims such as only trained teachers can help adults learn to read, that it's too difficult and not cost-effective to train and support volunteers and that volunteers take jobs away from paid staff. Perhaps realising that they were beginning to sound 'too precious', the professionals then changed tack to claim that volunteers were exploited. The latter claim was the most ludicrous of all - volunteers readily vote with their feet if they're dissatisfied!

Volunteer tutors must be a resilient lot as there are still several of them operating in small groups around the country. Some even willingly do their own fund-raising to buy resources - that's true dedication, not exploitation.

In WA the situation is quite different. The Volunteer Tutor Scheme (VTS), which was established in 1977, has survived the insecurities of the profession, the union and the inevitable cycle of changing government policies and initiatives. The scheme has continued to receive both Commonwealth and state funding. It also receives extensive in-kind support from the Midland College of TAFE.

Today, WA (as far as we know) is the only state with a centrally coordinated network of volunteers and almost 1000 tutors in 24 regions servicing approximately 1200 students each year.

The 'too quiet achiever'

It hasn't always been smooth sailing. The VTS was the epitome of the 'quiet achiever' and having weathered all the other storms it was the low profile of the scheme that almost brought about its demise.

In 1998, after the scheme had been in operation for 21 years, the Department conducted a review. The intention was to close the scheme and the purpose of the review was to give the



Literacy students' children getting dizzy at a picnic organised by volunteer literacy tutors—Perth WA

justification for doing so. What the review found was that there was actually very good work being done and results being achieved. There was also a great deal of support for the scheme to continue from students and volunteers.

What became quite obvious from reading

Literacy Link (ISSN 0158-3026) is the newsletter of the Australian Council for Adult Literacy. The Council is a voluntary organisation set up in 1976 to support the development of adult literacy, numeracy and basic education in Australia.

ACAL promotes co-operation among interested organisations and individuals, both government and non-government, by undertaking and encouraging appropriate study, research and action.

Literacy Link is distributed free to ACAL members. Articles are available online on the ACAL Homepage: <http://www.acal.edu.au> You are invited to discuss issues raised in ***Literacy Link*** through contributions to the ACAL Discussion list. Subscribe by email to : majordomo@edna.edu.au with message *subscribe acal-discussion* end.

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between the lines of the review, was that the Volunteer Tutor Scheme hadn't failed to deliver a good quality, cost-effective service to its students—it had instead failed to promote its achievements and failed to build recognition for the scheme and the Department in the community.

The scheme had consumed funding for 21 years and in the beginning this notion of building a 'market presence' was unheard of in this field. However, times had changed and the Volunteer Tutor Scheme hadn't moved with the times.

Today, funding bodies/sponsors want more in return for their dollar. To provide a good service is no longer enough, the sponsor wants recognition and they want to be associated with a winning service/organisation/program.

A major outcome of the review was in relation to the marketing and the profile of the scheme. A deadline of ten weeks was set to relaunch the service with a new name, logo, image and range of promotional materials to be unveiled at a Ministerial function with a guest list of over 1100 people.

This was achieved with fantastic support from graphic designers and media personalities who volunteered their expertise to successfully launch Read Write Now! Two years later some of the results of the concerted effort to build the profile and success of Read Write Now! include a regular presence in the media, a string of awards, an unprecedented influx of volunteers who donate their expertise in graphic design, website development and software development, in addition to literacy tutoring.

One of the highlights is the strategic alliance with the Library Information Service of Western Australia where all libraries now use the vibrant Read Write Now! logo to identify adult literacy resources. This enables students to independently find resources and also attracts more tutors.



Blow Your Own Trumpet to Survive

Most importantly our strong 'market presence' has resulted in more secure funding for the service to continue and to expand. One very strong lesson is, to receive marginal funding is to learn to blow your own trumpet loud and clear - to quietly deliver a good quality service is no longer enough to satisfy funding bodies.

Of course it is only possible to build and sustain

a high profile when it's based on a solid foundation of consistent results. An independent survey of Read Write Now! students showed a 92% satisfaction rate with the program. The success stories are too numerous to mention here but receive regular coverage in the local media.

Volunteers do what professionals can't

Read Write Now! tutors provide a service for adults who have experienced a sense of failure in the school system and who would not again cross the threshold into a formal educational institution. Typically, our students not only lack literacy skills, they also have lost confidence in their ability to learn and carry a sense of shame about their struggle with literacy. Many migrants/ refugees also seek out Read Write Now! as we are not restricted by the red tape that limits access to services.

Tutors also provide support for TAFE students who are struggling with reading their course materials. Read Write Now! tutors offer something that professionals can't provide - the luxury of being able to work on a one-to-one basis with privacy and confidentiality and no curriculum restrictions.

Are volunteer tutors effective?

Most successful outcomes are a result of the trust and rapport built between the student and the tutor. Of course, the completion of the accredited tutor training course contributes to the success - but the rebuilding of the learner's self esteem, providing a private and supportive environment that encourages risk-taking in learning and then working on materials tailor-made to meet the student's immediate needs and interests also play a major part in the student's success. Most professionals can only envy the opportunity to give this level of service.

Is there a future for volunteer tutoring?

The future in WA looks quite secure but what of the rest of Australia? The adult literacy issue certainly isn't going to go away so perhaps it's high time that paid practitioners welcomed volunteer tutors to join forces to provide an appropriate range of services that cater for adult students at all levels of skill and confidence.

Professional associations, such as ACAL, have a major role to play in providing a forum that will enable the fragmented remains of volunteer tutoring to reconnect and form a more enlightened and empowered network. Anyone involved in volunteer tutoring is invited to make contact with Read Write Now!

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Guidelines for employing volunteer literacy tutors

by Claire Gardner

These guidelines were drawn up for the English Language Volunteer Home Tutor Program. The program was borne out of a need to provide follow-up English language sessions for women from a non-English speaking background (NESB) who were unable to attend English classes outside their own homes because they had recently had a baby. The (students) women were recruited through the English as a Second Language for Childbirth Program - a thirty hour language program offered by the Council of Adult Education (CAE) at the Royal Women's Hospital in Melbourne.



Volunteer program aims and program implementation

- To facilitate a friendly, non-threatening environment in which the student can confidently improve and develop language skills.
- To provide information about further education and community services, through the CAE contact person.
- To practise and improve specific language skills in order to be able to access these services.

Volunteer rights and responsibilities

(The following is taken, in part, from information provided by the Volunteer Centre of Victoria Inc. Telephone (03) 9650 5541)

As a CAE volunteer tutor you have the right to:

- information about the organisation for which you are volunteering
- a clearly written job description
- know to whom you are accountable
- be supported, supervised and receive on-going training
- a healthy and safe working environment
- be covered by insurance
- say 'no' if you feel you are being exploited
- be informed and consulted on matters which directly affect you and your work

As a volunteer you need to :

- Ask for student's expectation of you as a language tutor and in general about the program.
- Make sure that the student understands that you are only there to help them improve their English conversational skills
- Focus on improving communication skills (avoid becoming emotionally or financially involved with your student)
- If faced with a difficult situation seek advice from your contact person at the CAE.
- Avoid situations that the student may interpret as threatening; keep the sessions casual and relaxed.
- Recognise that the power to learn is with the

student - don't become frustrated if you feel that the student is not progressing as rapidly as you had hoped.

- Find out about their long term and short term educational goals.
- Choose materials/topics that contain shared interests and/or relate to the student's life goals. Newspapers and 'junk mail' can provide a versatile spring board for discussion, vocabulary building and reading practice.
- Talk about their family background but wait till they initiate the exchange - many of our students have been victims of torture and may have suffered family losses.
- If appropriate, set tasks for them to do in between home visits, such as ask someone directions/the time etc.
- Inform your student about local services/facilities/festivals.
- Try to vary the venue if possible. Go for a walk (if the baby is awake). Talk about the things around you.
- Use the resources available in the CAE library. You may like to watch a video together and then discuss it. There are some great cooking videos in the CAE library.

"As a volunteer in this program you do not replace paid workers nor constitute a threat to the job security of paid workers..."

You need to :

- Be reliable and punctual
- Practise and observe standards of confidentiality
- Carry out the specific job description
- Be accountable
- Undertake training as requested
- Ask for support when you need it
- Give notice before you leave the organisation
- Carry out the work you have agreed to do responsibly and ethically.
- Be able to provide the names and telephone numbers of two referees.

As a volunteer in this program you do not replace paid workers nor constitute a threat to the job security of paid workers nor will you be placed in compromising positions with regards to work disputes.

Volunteer support and benefits

The Volunteer English Language Home Tutor Program provides:

- The opportunity to meet people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds and other volunteers.
- Twelve months access to the ESL collection,

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The Never Too Late Show

The Never Too Late Show is a television series designed to teach adult literacy and numeracy through comedy. It is accompanied by a workbook. The comedy format used is in the style of 'Seinfeld' or 'Friends' and so has appeal for young adults who enjoy this type of television. The Never Too Late Show was trialled at Scone High School in the Hunter Valley, NSW.

Prices (including GST):

TAFEs and schools

one video \$97.90

series of 10 videos . . . \$783.20

Universities and others

one video \$170.00

series of 10 videos . . . \$1400.00

Teachers' workbook . . . \$21.80

The series was produced by TAFE NSW in conjunction with Artist Services Pty Ltd, and funded by Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs. Videos are available from Educational Media Australia Phone 03 9699 7144 and workbooks are available from Access Educational Services, TAFE NSW, phone 02 9846 8101.

Report on the use of *The Never Too Late Show* at Scone High School, NSW

The materials were trialled with 13 students in a lower ability Year 10 class. They lacked confidence in their literacy skills and are difficult to motivate. Most hope to leave school at the completion of Year 10.

Use of videos and workbook

The Never Too Late Show materials were used in an intensive way for a period of five weeks in Term 3 in a Unit entitled 'Real World Literacy Skills'. The class worked on *The Never Too Late Show* for every period during this time. Their work consisted of a mixture of viewing, discussion and written activities.

The students enjoyed the material. A number of the students recognised the well-known comedian, Michael Veitch. They found the episodes and sketches funny. The quick-grab nature was familiar and appealing to these students, whose attention span is short. After watching two episodes the class was 'hooked'.

Using the materials in the classroom

The videos and workbook link effectively. The

teaching process was as follows:

1. Each episode was shown in sections, with the teacher stopping the tape to lead students to the recognition of a specific literacy need as it occurred.
2. There was guided discussion of literacy issues raised within the episode, to establish students' recognition of the need for this particular literacy learning.
3. Workbook activities were completed, using a variety of learning situations eg. individually, in pairs and in groups.
4. Completed activities were marked, both within and outside of class time.
5. Further activities were supplied by the teacher, for example the School Certificate entry form, Austudy application form, and Work Experience letters.
6. Some students provided their own 'real life' activities to work on: job applications, advertisements for the local paper classifieds, and apprenticeship application forms.



A number of the students recognised the well-known comedian, Michael Veitch.

Outcomes

Writing skills improved across the whole group. Students showed improvement in structure and paragraphing and

an enhanced understanding of writing for a purpose and a specific audience.

Synthesising information, reading instructions and vocabulary improved. Language and literacy skills were enhanced through examination of persuasive language. Chapter 6 (Reading and Writing Advertising) gave students experience of reading between the lines, a skill which many find difficult.

Conclusion

The Never Too Late Show (videos and workbook) is recommended for use with young students with literacy learning needs.

The use of this resource significantly reduces teacher preparation time. Because the workbook is designed for use without individual instruction, the teacher can be the facilitator rather than the instructor.

*Roslyn Mackintosh
Scone High School*

Voices from the field—volunteer tutors

by Ann Brown

Volunteer tutors are the backbone of literacy provision in South Australia; without them many programs would not be operating.

Who are volunteer tutors? What is the profile of an 'average' volunteer tutor?

Changing times have created an interesting evolution in this field. Once the average tutor would have been either a retired person or someone in the community who did not work, had spare time, a desire to assist others and their literacy skills were higher than the students'. Whilst we still have a number of tutors who would fit the 'traditional' model, more often today's tutors are people in the community who are unemployed and seeking new skills or networks.

This shift is reflective of broader community changes, due to the validation of volunteering as an approved activity by CentreLink. Today's tutor is trained using accredited curriculum, is often computer literate and has an understanding of professional work practices.

Despite the changing nature of volunteering the basic reason for tutoring remains the same—a desire to assist others in the community to develop skills. The expected 'trade off' may differ from our retirees who merely wished to fill their time valuably to today's volunteers who want training, professional development, references and career pathway assistance.

Case study: Debbie's story

Debbie is perhaps not a classic example of the 'new breed' of volunteers but does have aspects of the traditional and the contemporary. She is a sole supporting parent in her mid 30's -raising three children on her own.

She was two years into a teaching degree when she quit to have children. A range of negative life experiences over the following six years eroded her self-confidence and esteem. When she came to the community centre she was aware of a need to do something—but was unsure what. When literacy tutoring was suggested she was not sure of her abilities but decided to 'give it a go'. Debbie's progress has been remarkable; not only is she one of my most productive tutors but she has also developed and facilitates an L's group, a walking group and co-runs a craft group. A valuable asset one would say and yet there's more—she also is the organisation's publicity officer.

What is the 'trade off' for Debbie? Perhaps the best person to tell you this is Debbie; read on

for her story—

What volunteering means to me!

A few years ago I was in the position where my youngest child was in kindy and approaching school age. I would have a few hours a day to follow my own dreams—this was very scary stuff. Once upon a time I had had the dream to be a schoolteacher but had deferred my studies for my family. Ten years on it seemed like the dream was lost forever.

... often today's tutors are unemployed and seeking new skills or networks .. due to validation of volunteering as an approved activity by Centrelink

So I went around to Northern Area Community and Youth Services Inc (NACYS). All of the kids had gone to occasional care there, so it wasn't a strange place to me..... And I volunteered. That simple act started a great change in my life. I did some mandatory training, the first I had done in years. I was placed on a Community Improvement Program, became the literacy/numeracy tutor and asked to do some publicity. To do this I actually had to go back to school. While I got to convince other people their skills were useful and they were a success I was actually convincing myself!

From this beginning I was thrown into teaching programs, very gently of course, and once again had to update my education. There was much I didn't know. At the beginning this was all in a voluntary capacity. However, I am now employed on a casual basis. What better is there in the world than to do something you love and actually get paid for it!

Now I teach varying things (both volunteer and paid), am a full time student myself, I still have a volunteer position and wonder how I could once have possibly thought I was 'just a Mum' and not useful.

Debbie's experience is mirrored by many volunteers Australia wide - personal growth and satisfaction are the rewards.

As an adult literacy educator for almost 11 years I can also talk about the value of volunteering from two separate angles - as a course coordinator and as a volunteer.

In 1990 I was searching for a pathway. My sister was born with an intellectual disability, I married a man who was numerate but not literate, both my children had minor learning

Never a dull moment as an adult literacy tutor

by Peggy Wolfe and Betty Anderson

The two authors describe themselves as 'two mature aged women with . . . a deal of life experience'. In fact, one is 72 years old and, as we go to print, the other will turn 83!

Our association with the Adult Literacy and Basic Education (ALBE) Programme commenced approximately 13 years ago when we applied to do a training course which was advertised in the local newspaper. As two mature aged women with

slipped through the education system and wanted help.

In 1988 we attended a two day tutor training course. Since 1993 tutor training has been conducted over ten weekly sessions (25 hours duration), covering a broader range of topics and in 2001 training will be accredited. Our training was not very intense; nowadays the tutors have to be more skilled.

PEGGY'S STORY:

One of my students who came to me in a very depressed state, turned out to be the most interesting and successful in the end - his wife had walked out after 30 years of marriage taking with her all the best furniture and belongings including his photos. To make matters worse she took most of their money, as they had a joint account. He was tearful for the first 3-4 months of his weekly lessons.

Gradually he cheered up and began to work hard at his spelling and his writing. I got him to sign his name in an individual way for banking use - he loved doing that. He made such good progress that he told me that he had been promoted at work. He was now in charge of twelve people. I could see his morale getting better and better.

One morning he arrived for his lesson carrying a ticket for Russia. I knew he had a pen pal from Yekaterinburg. She sounded a very nice lady, who wrote him letters with hearts stuck all over them. He had suddenly decided to go to Russia to meet her. We all advised him to be very careful, as Russia could be a rather dangerous place to visit politically. He had a wonderful time, enjoying the food and the vodka immensely. It all went so well that he persuaded his Marika to come to Tasmania to marry him. The story ends sadly, she did come, but left after a week. I had to get help from the Russian Orthodox priest and his wife to look after her until her family sent the money for her return ticket.

His life has turned out happily in the end, as he married a delightful Thai lady and now I am helping her with English.

Our students have ranged from those needing basic skills to young people needing to pass pre-selection tests to enter the forces. Very often students wanted to keep their lack of literacy secret from their families and needed quiet, unobtrusive help by understanding tutors. The tutor became a confidante and friend and the student benefitted from a one-to-one learning situation. Lessons varied from 1-3 hours per week and took place in tutor's or student's homes. We feel that the success we have had in our area was due mostly to compatible matching by our coordinator, Liz Cooper.

We have been fortunate to be in the Kingston/Channel

reasonable education, intelligence and a deal of life experience, we hoped to improve the literacy and numeracy skills of adults who had

area (south of Hobart) where our coordinator has been available at all times to help and advise us. Monthly lunch time Tutor Support Group meetings



Voices from the field cont.

problems. So with all this in my history, is it any wonder that a literacy program attracted me? I became a volunteer tutor and within twelve months was working in the field and studying. As a volunteer and then educator I have never lost sight of the reciprocal learning that is exchanged between student and educator/tutor.

My role as volunteer coordinator allows me to share their successes (and there are many) with my tutors and students. The beaming

look on both faces as they come to show how they 'battled the demon' and won is both rewarding and humbling—that they let me share this moment. I am sure that every educator remembers the following situations:

- The person who comes for an assessment believing that their skills are low and linked to their intelligence walking out beaming when told that they are intelligent people with good practical skills who need to work on their literacy.
- The angry person who hated school and bears the scars of reluctance to learn who, when

are held where we discuss any problems that arise. At these we are updated with information, discuss different teaching methods and have occasional guest speakers. We have a small library donated by Kingston Rotary which is available to both tutors and students and there is a comprehensive Resource Centre in Hobart where there are workshops with guest speakers held several times a year arranged by the Tasmanian Council for Adult Literacy (TCAL) and ALBE.

Adult literacy students have changed considerably since the programme's inception. We still have people who need help with everyday life skills: filling in forms, reading labels, following written instructions, reading and replying to letters and reading to their children, that is, functional literacy, to enable them to improve the quality of their lives.

Recently there is more emphasis placed on stu-



Betty and Peggy have staunchly defended literacy education over the years in letters to newspapers

BETTY'S STORY:

A student who stands out in my memory is Ellen, my first student. She was 20 years old, with three children when she first came to my home, with very low self-esteem. Her mother died when she was 5 years old and she spent the next ten years in and out of foster homes and institutions, changing schools regularly and was labelled "dumb and stupid". Her main aim in classes was to read to her children and help them with school work enabling them to have a better education than she'd had.

One project which greatly improved the digestion of the family was the cooking lessons. She made a recipe book in which she wrote simple recipes and sometimes she'd bring the ingredients to cook the evening meal for her family and we'd do this in my kitchen - also cakes for special occasions, biscuits, etc. When she learned to read the instructions on the baby's formula the baby's health also improved greatly. She also learned some basic first aid as they lived in a remote area and medical attention was one hour's drive away.

Over a period of two years Ellen came to lessons for three hours each week, learned very quickly, was very conscientious and I had a great admiration for her determination to improve her own and her family's lot in life, despite her own very sad upbringing.

dents who are anxious to improve their skills to enable them to get jobs more easily, keep jobs or get promotion, that is, vocational literacy.

Since joining TAFE Tasmania, ALBE now has to be more accountable, as government funding is dependent on numbers and outcomes. Tutors have to complete detailed forms of attendance, enrolment, progress and personal assessment of each student at the end of the year. Coordinators are under constant pressure to justify their positions - their workload is greater, leaving them less time to devote to adults who do not attend classes.

We feel very strongly that adult literacy should cater for all adults who seek assistance regardless of status. The Government is ready to help the able people to be educated, but the plight of the less able has been forgotten and shelved, in every way including financial.

What about us? From each student we have learned something - they have shown that despite many difficulties they are determined to improve their own and their family's lives.

writing poetry for the first time as a cathartic exercise, recognises the power of words.

- The awakening of a love of literature in one whom hitherto only read the TV guide.
- The person who attends for the first time and has personal hygiene problems, mirroring low self esteem, possible homelessness and who, after a great deal of support—including advocacy, counselling and communication building, leaves the course eventually to become a volunteer themselves.

- The tutor who comes to you with the recognition that educators are not the guardians of all knowledge but are learners themselves and therefore feels more confident to accept the challenges of teaching skills where she is only two steps ahead herself.

Today's tutors are skilled volunteers and the field owes them a debt of gratitude. Volunteers are the heart, strength and voice of our community.

Ann Brown
Volunteer & Placement Coordinator (Northern Area Community & Youth Services Inc) SA

Working with volunteers—reflections on 20 years in adult literacy

by Joan Giumelli

Way back in the 1970s, specialised adult literacy provision was new in Australia. In New South Wales, a few classes already existed in evening colleges using traditional primary-school methods, but new TAFE programs were initiated by Kath White in 1977. In line with the political emphasis on access and equity in further education for disadvantaged adult groups (Kangan Report, 1975) they seemed a tremendous advance, being based on the concept of literacy as a human right rather than on the established remediation model. As in Britain, the procedure was to use trained volunteers ('the living indication of the caring community') to give free one-to-one tuition in a community location, often the home. In such settings, content, method, timing, location and materials for learning could be negotiated with students and tailored to their needs.

NSWALNC forum

A Way With Words

6 April 2001, Sydney

Cost: members \$95 non members \$120
The forum targets literacy practitioners who would like stimulation in their teaching of writing. To do this, we have a range of writers who will give insights into their own writing practices. Included are a legal writer, a cartoonist, a web designer, a fiction writer and a 'writer as advocate'. Kaye Schofield, as chair of ALNARC, will open the forum.

For registration details contact Leslie Stein
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Most of us involved in those early days, were mostly brought up on the ideas of the gurus of the 60s and 70s like Freire, Illich, Knowles and Carl Rogers.

Consequently, we were brimming with enthusiasm for our new roles in student-led, whole-person education. From the beginning the demand from prospective learners was often more than one coordinator could effectively manage, so one-to-one provision was supplemented by

small-group tuition on-campus with professional teachers. Appropriate university level training in adult basic education (or ESOL for that matter) did not exist and most of us who became Adult Literacy Officers (ALOs) (the TAFE designation for coordinators of volunteer programs) had backgrounds in school teaching. Consequently, there was a lot of 'learning on the job' and from each other in an atmosphere of great camaraderie.

The concept of a cooperative endeavour between government bureaucracy and the community seemed visionary - and indeed it was! Democratic 'learning partnerships' between professional coordinator, resourceful volunteer

tutor and committed student broke new ground in respecting each participant's right to share in decision-making about content and style of tuition. But I and my fellow ALOs were certainly naive in believing that such a system would continue to grow and flourish without much alteration, subject as it was to institutional restructuring and changes in government policy.

Growth and tensions

Through the early 80s, as demand for assistance soared and more basic education teachers were employed, questions of professional career paths and industrial relations issues between literacy/numeracy teachers working in college classrooms and ALOs out in the community loomed ever larger. The 'quality of service' provided by 'volunteer amateurs' was questioned by those struggling to establish Adult Literacy Teaching as a profession with satisfactory rates of pay and working conditions. They saw such tutors as a threat to their professional status, especially once post-graduate courses were established and qualifications for employment were set by TAFE.

In addition, ALOs were barred from promotion unless they became on-campus teachers, so effectively there was no career path for those coordinating volunteer programs. Recently (Sim, 2000), the whole conflict was downplayed as 'more an industrial issue than an educational one' (p.13), but in reality the opposing educational viewpoints were also poles apart. Both here and overseas journal articles appeared, one side espousing the unique learner as 'knower' of his own needs and goals (Illesley, 1985) with the nonprofessional tutor as 'learning assistant' (Cervero, 1985) and the other promoting the expert teacher as 'enlightened guide' (Bradshaw, 1992).

Volunteer programs and 'invisible women'

Debate raged in NSW in the mid 1980s, with TAFE and the Teachers Federation allies (for their own purposes) to eliminate or at least restrict the role of volunteers. The professionalisation of the field sought by the teachers was gradually achieved through the late 80s and early 90s with their status and numbers enhanced; funding by ILY (International Year of Literacy 1990) and ALLP (Australian Language and Literacy Policy 1992) fostered deeper and more sophisticated research and teaching methodology better grounded and richer in resources. Volunteer programs, while still existing, largely disappeared from serious consideration and as Marilyn Childs wrote in 1995,

were staffed by 'invisible women'.

However, the politically driven move of TAFE away from the community and from further education (the FE) and deeper into work training (T) propelled literacy into the 'mainstream' of vocational competency-based training. Paradoxically, this actually cut across the teachers' aims and by the late 90's language/literacy/numeracy teaching seems to have been largely subsumed into delivering 'training packages'. (Kell, 1999). The profession is increasingly casualised, with a consequent decline in numbers and morale.

What about volunteer programs?

My personal position in all these arguments remained pro-volunteer, because I believed that the two systems (professional - group tuition and volunteer - one-to-one tuition) were not in competition, but complementary. Nobody would deny the need for a learning pathway through accredited courses for those who need or want them; on the other hand, there will always be those who are not ready for group tuition, whether emotionally or in skill level, and those for whom informal, private, flexible learning with a nonprofessional helper exactly meets their needs. Consequently, I resigned from TAFE in 1987 and with those tutors and students who walked out with me, set up Literacy Network as a 'community association for the sharing of literacy skills'.

The Network is still very much part of our local community in the north of Sydney today, partially funded by BACE (Board of Adult and Community Education) but the rest comes from fee-for-service work and fund-raising. We operate as professionally as possible, insisting on substantial training for tutors (but not competency-based), careful assessment and matching, and close liaison of student/tutor pairs with their coordinator. Indeed, many people who have gone on to careers in Adult Basic Education received their initial training and first supervised teaching experience as volunteer tutors.

Yet lack of interest in our efforts by the 'powers that be' means we have little sense of belonging in a broader field of endeavour, whether literacy or volunteering. In adult basic education, we are marginalised as volunteers, in adult education we do not count because we are specialised providers and the world of organised volunteering pays little heed to the field of adult education. I am sure those working in 1:1 community programs in other States would also see a crying need for recognition, research and consequent specifically targeted professional development. Some contact between us would certainly help to alleviate the sense of isolation, which must be even more intense for those

assisting others' learning on a purely, informal neighbourly basis with no knowledge of the resources and support available. When we broaden our vision to the community-at-large, the reach of the professional looks very limited indeed.

Meanwhile, Literacy Network continues to operate on what a speech-writer of the Prime Minister recently called 'those tired old social justice shibboleths'. Our

volunteers tend to be younger than in the past (30s to 50s) and are often working women - men tutors are few and far between - though the recently retired form a sizeable minority, bringing a wealth of skills and knowledge from teaching and other relevant careers. They often work with us for years.

Students, both ESB and NESB, number about 60 at any one time, with ages ranging from 15-year-olds who could not 'hack' the school system to seniors improving their skills to enhance their lives.

Certainly, the conundrum of professionalism versus learner power and community involvement remains as difficult to solve as it ever did, since outcomes-based training and contractual accountability are now central to government policy. To be marginalised is probably the only way to preserve some freedom of choice in both content and methodology, but how long can programs based on personal relationships rather than regulations survive?

A glimmer of hope lies in the concept of the community sector as the 'third way' between public and private sectors. In the present post-Olympic euphoria, both Federal and State governments trumpet their support for volunteering and for the 'development of social capital' (the current buzz phrase). In reality, however, Governments remain quite ambivalent on the question as revealed in an Issues Paper circulated by the Charities Definition Inquiry (2000).

The Committee notes 'communities being encouraged to take greater responsibility for developing their own solutions to their problems and needs' while at the same time 'government funding for the sector [is] being provided



Our oldest student, a Hungarian lady who studied conscientiously and to good effect every week for several years, died recently at the age of 92.

Volunteer tutoring in the UK

by Carol Taylor

'I started at the family literacy group when Ross's teacher asked me if I would like to be involved in a new group for parents. I was really scared when I first went - I actually felt sick in the morning! - but I thought 'I'm doing this for Ross' so I went in and I really loved it. I improved my spelling and my reading, and I learnt how to help Ross. Then Karen (the tutor) asked us what we wanted to do next and I said I'd like to help out in school. She got me onto this course, and I've worked with seven children so far, helping them with their reading, and now I've started the NVQ. In September I became a governor at the school, and started a computer course. I'd really like to go to university, I'd like to become a social worker.' Angie

In the past four years over 1800 volunteers have become involved in literacy work in Derbyshire, from 15 year olds as 'Buddies' through parents in school and employees in local factories, to retired people full of energy and wanting to 'put something back'. What started as one small part of a new and developing community literacy initiative became an integral part of the overall strategy, and one of the cornerstones of its success. ('Read On-Write Away! Interim Report' 2000)

Volunteers, usually parents and carers, have always been a rich resource in primary schools in the UK - when used well they can be distinct and invaluable members of the team of adults working with children. When badly used -

untrained, unsupported, doing menial tasks - they are relegated to pot-washers and message takers. In adult basic education, volunteer tutors are often the bedrock on which the service survives, supporting part-time tutors by working one-to-one with students.

In 1997 an Initiative called Read On - Write Away! began in Derbyshire, a large, diverse and fairly rural county with a population of about 1 million people, in central England. Read On - Write Away! was launched as a 'Community Literacy Strategy', working to raise standards of literacy through the involvement of whole communities, in partnership with a number of organisations, and with a particular emphasis on areas of socio-economic deprivation.

Uniquely in the UK, this partnership was both outside of local government (constituted as an independent partnership) and concerned with lifelong learning—working with 0-99 year olds, both in and out of the formal education systems. In addition the Board was made up of Chief Executives from a number of local and



continued from previous page

increasingly through outcome based funding agreements for the provision of defined services ...[and] contracts for the delivery of government programs.. [are] being awarded increasingly on the basis of competitive tendering processes' (p.7). The outcome of the vaunted 'government-community partnerships' looks problematical indeed. The present politi-

cal climate is far from the favorable one of the 1970's.

*Joan Giumelli
Literacy Network, NSW*

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national agencies; people with both the vision and the power to help make the idea a reality. The Initiative grew from two people and a small amount of core funding, to a team of 25 people, with a number of funding streams, recognised within the UK as an exciting, innovative and effective way of raising standards and engaging people in learning.

The underpinning ethos was to work with people to enable them to improve their literacy and basic skills, so that they could have choices - choices about employment, helping their children or joining the library, improving their skills or to act as 'brokers' or volunteers in their own communities. The vision was of a strategic approach, one where people could have access to numerous, diverse and relevant opportunities to get involved in improving their skills, one where the quality of provision was based on what people wanted, where this was made to fit the outcomes that funders wanted, not the other way around.

'When I was 14 I had a reading age of nine'.....

As programmes and strategies unfolded and were developed, more and more adults and children became involved as volunteers: as Buddy Readers - young people acting as reading mentors to younger children; as Reading Partners - parents, carers and other volunteers working intensively with individual children; as Care Leaver Buddies - young adults who had been through the care system, trained to work with other children in public care; as Story Sacks groups - making Sacks in their lunch hour for local nurseries. This began to impact on children and adults- on test scores, on levels of confidence, on the skills levels of families.

It also began to impact on the volunteers themselves - young people with poor literacy skills began to improve their own skills and become re-engaged with learning. Parents acting as Reading Partners began to clamour for 'something else to do'; employees began to ask if there were courses they could do.

As William, now aged 16 said: 'When I was 14 I had a Reading Age of nine - I got involved in the Buddy Reading because I wanted to help others who weren't doing very well. I improved my score (Reading Age) so much that I wanted to do something with my life'. In August William's teacher phoned to say that he had got 5 GCSEs and had been accepted for the Army...she was in tears!

Volunteers become part of a quality system -

trained, supported, rewarded, and offered ongoing opportunities for further development. Within the programme they are offered a 'raft' of different opportunities, from 6 hour training on sharing books, through 2 day intensive training to be a Talking Partner, to a 10-week course to be a qualified Volunteer Adult Tutor. We have trained staff in supermarkets, midday supervisors, young people in Residential Care and in Youth Clubs and over 15 Women's Institutes. Our volunteers include, at the moment, a vicar, a fireman, three caretakers and a retired colonel, as well as 48 young people who have left public care.



A qualified 'Better Reading Partner'

We have developed training opportunities in supporting reading, in working with young children on speaking and listening, for volunteers who want to work with adults and for those acting as 'signposters' in local communities, able to act as a friendly face for those who want help. This year, in a Working Men's Club, we launched a community-based 'Access to Higher Education' course, run in partnership with a local college, for eight women who all started as basic skills students and volunteers. This month we launch two new volunteer programmes on writing, enabling volunteers to work with children and young people to encourage and develop writing skills and imagination.



We lose our volunteers all the time - they get jobs as classroom assistants in schools, they leave the factory floor for 'better jobs', they sign on to full-time courses. Others volunteer regularly, when they can fit it in around the rest of their life and get pleasure from helping others. As Paul, caretaker at a local school and one of our Reading Champions said: 'I get a great feeling when I've worked with one of the lads and the teacher tells me how much he's improved; I get an even better feeling when he's waiting for me at lunchtime with a new book he wants to tell me about.'

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*Carol Taylor
Director of Read On - Write Away!*

Carol is hoping to visit Australia to attend the ACAL/QCAL National Conference 1—3 Nov., Surfers Paradise, Queensland.

Meeting community literacy needs with volunteers

by Jean Searle

In the early days of adult literacy, Kath White identified a tension between remaining true to adult education principles of being free to respond to individual and community needs, as and when they arise, and lobbying for government funding for programs and therefore complying with government agendas and accountability measures. Sadie Foster and Marie Byrne, in Queensland, chose to respond by offering a volunteer tutor program which, like many other similar programs, drew on members of the community who accepted a responsibility to address a perceived need which was not otherwise acknowledged or provided for. The decision to use volunteers was in many cases a pragmatic one, assistance was required and there was no funding for paid staff. At the same time, the nature of the volunteer tutor, as someone who has empathy with others, has always been important and even with the development of more formal literacy provision, volunteer tutors often play a vital role. Some of the challenges of maintaining fundamental beliefs while conducting government funded programs are outlined in the next section.

Re-forming adult literacy principles

Traditionally, adult literacy practitioners accepted a primary responsibility to their students and students' learning. Early 'statements of principle' included the voluntary participation of students, negotiation of a student centred curriculum, the development of student self-confidence and engagement in whole language pedagogies. Such principles reflect a social-justice agenda and a 'sense of commitment' which has been noted by observers of adult literacy practitioners, whether teachers or volunteer tutors, in the UK (Mace, 1994) and the USA (Wilson & Corbett, 2000). However, as adult literacy programs have changed, the tensions outlined by Kath White earlier, have become more apparent. With the introduction of national competency-based curricula and employment focused funding, adult literacy is perceived as being integral to training reform and essential for the long-term unemployed, thereby related to vocational and employment goals. So, what does this mean for volunteer tutors?

Some adult literacy programs have re-formed the principle of 'meeting individual needs' into 'learning about student interests or concerns' (Mace, 1994) so that literacy becomes a situated practice, embedded within a meaningful, relevant, social activity. This is not easy to do when faced with a modular, competency-based curriculum which has vocational or employment

focused outcomes, and cost per student contact hour is the basic selection criteria in the tendering process. However, if an initial 'Independent Learning Program' can be factored into the program for each student, the individual needs of the student can be catered for more readily with the support of volunteer tutors. But, along with the vocational focus of programs came the necessity for accreditation, and this also applied to volunteers.

Increased credentials for volunteers

Many of the early volunteer tutor programs started from the premise that 'if you could read you could help someone else to read' - an 'each one teach one' approach. Other programs favoured a more formal approach such as the ten hour Mt Gravatt volunteer tutor training program (Foster and Byrne, 1979), which covered affective, cognitive and action components, backed up with on-going tutor support. However, with the introduction of the national reform agenda, all vocational education and training (VET) courses and providers had to be accredited, and all curricula were to become modularised, competency based and linked to vocational or employment outcomes. In Queensland, this resulted in the development of competency based adult literacy curricula for the teaching of adult literacy and the Adult Literacy Volunteer Tutor Training Curriculum (CN543) for the training of volunteer tutors. The aim of the Volunteer Tutor Training Curriculum was to enable trainers to organise a comprehensive, competency-based training program which would provide opportunities for volunteers to develop the knowledge, attitudes and skills considered most desirable for tutors of adult literacy students. As opposed to the informality of assessment in the early tutor training programs, volunteers now had to demonstrate that they met the criteria, at the indicated standard, associated with each learning outcome, to be assessed as competent. From a previous commitment to a short training course, now a minimum of 100 hours training was required over a twelve month period. As will be shown in the next section, this commitment has had quite a significant impact on the nature of volunteers.

The changing face of volunteerism

The implementation of the new tutor training curricula received a mixed response. Some practitioners welcomed the introduction of accredited courses and the accreditation of providers as bringing some professionalisation to the field. Other practitioners strongly opposed the imposition of curricula.

There's a lot of interference, you're not free to deliver individual programs. You have to get by certain regimental sets of guidelines and rules and things and you know, I find that very frustrating. At least when you were doing it on your own you could serve the person that you were dealing with and it was much better. (Mavis Cooper, interview, 19.4.95)

At this time (1990-1995) as funding for adult literacy programs became tied to vocational and employment outcomes, many of the volunteer tutor programs in TAFE ceased, although subsequently they have reappeared. Figures regarding enrolments, as recorded on the (TAFE) College Administrative Project System (CAPS) database, suggest that in 1995, 621 volunteer tutors were working with students, giving a total of 40,975 voluntary student contact hours (SCHs). This compared with 849 tutors and 80,736 SCHs in 1990. During this time, many community groups had emerged as literacy providers using volunteer tutors; however, no comparable statistics were available.

Some program co-ordinators attributed the decline in the number of volunteers working with students in TAFE programs to the changing nature of volunteers. For example, one co-ordinator stated that many women who formerly might have been volunteers 'are now having to return to the workforce... [As a result] it is more difficult to get volunteers for daytime programs and volunteers do not stay as long - they leave when they get paid employment.' (personal communication). Another trend is for people to use volunteering as a first step towards either a further qualification or paid employment. For example, one co-ordinator commented:

Ten years ago it was seen as an adequate, rewarding thing for women to do and today it's no longer seen that way. A lot more women want something more than a traditional caring role somewhere as a volunteer. Maybe they're looking for something more challenging or more rewarding for themselves. (personal communication)

Another tutor co-ordinator argued that not as many people in the community were coming forward as volunteers: 'I used to get 80 responses to ads, these days 20 if we're lucky' (personal communication). Further, co-ordinators commented that tutors are not prepared to undertake the amount of training that is required. As the curriculum has become more formal, some tutors have become quite apprehensive about what is required. Some co-ordinators also question the ethics of requiring such a lengthy course before working with a student. In addition, with the introduction of the

adult literacy curriculum in TAFE, although volunteer tutors still play an important preliminary role, their support is in the context of working towards specified outcomes. In contrast, volunteers in community programs have retained a more informal approach in which they are more able to respond more specifically to individual student needs.

Conclusion

Morris (1991) argued that trained volunteers provide a flexibility of service in TAFE and community programs which would not otherwise be available. In Queensland 1990, the previously mentioned volunteers would have provided at least 75,296 hours of student contact. Costing this at \$15 per hour, the monetary contribution would have amounted to \$1,129,440 (Morris, 1991:54). It could be argued that volunteer tutors provide a cheap alternative to professional staff. On the other hand, it is time that all governments recognise the vital contribution of volunteers in filling the gaps in provision left when governments consistently abrogate their responsibilities in the area.

As Charnley and Jones pointed out back in 1979, students attend adult literacy programs for a range of reasons but those related to employment outcomes do not rate as highly as those related to the affective areas of adult learning. Students need to develop a positive, confident view of themselves as learners and have a similar trust and confidence in the provider. Not only does this take time, which is not always available in labour market programs, but this is an area in which individual tuition and the building of rapport are crucial. It is here that volunteer tutors have a vital role to play in overcoming initial barriers to learning. The appropriate use of volunteers adds an extra dimension to programs provided by professionals. They make it possible to provide a wider, more diverse and responsive service. So, the challenges to the field are firstly, not to lose sight of the needs of the individual student, and secondly, to work collaboratively, volunteer and professional, to keep adult literacy at the forefront of the nation's mind.

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CAE library.

- CAE-based training and short courses which will assist and equip the volunteer in the delivery of the program.
- Personal development
- Skill building
- Written references
- Life experience
- Community involvement

Job Description

The volunteer will :

- conduct English language sessions under the guidance of the English as a Second Language Department at the CAE
- visit the student at a mutually agreeable time and place for a minimum of one hour per week or maximum of two hours per week between 9 - 5 pm Monday to Friday (other arrangements are independent of the CAE)
- give the student prior notice should the session be cancelled or should you decide not to continue as a tutor
- liaise with ESL teacher (your contact

person from the CAE) should you experience any problems or need support or advice regarding Program Delivery

Contact Person(s)

Volunteers will be assisted and supported by a contact person. Your contact person is a qualified English as a Second Language teacher employed by the CAE. The contact person can assist you with resources, for example, or by offering suggestions on program delivery, or facilitating information regarding further education options for your student.

Paperwork

Volunteers will be expected to fill in a Time Sheet giving details of session dates and times. These time sheets should be forwarded to the 'contact person' at fortnightly intervals. Prepaid envelopes were provided for this purpose.

Postscript

The English Language Volunteer Home Tutor Program no longer exists due to lack of resources.

"Literacy for sale"

VALBEC Conference

22-23 March 2001

Melbourne

(venue to be confirmed)

Call for papers

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