

TASMANIAN

VOICES



ADULT MOTIVATIONS
FOR LEARNING
CORE SKILLS

2011

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research explored the personal experience of Tasmanian adults living with low literacy and its impact on their daily lives. The research also sought to better understand the barriers to taking up core skills learning, as well as the potential motivators and ongoing support that would encourage adult engagement in core skills learning.

The majority of adults who were consulted for this research had never before spoken so openly and honestly about this aspect of their lives. For some, talking about low literacy raised deep and painful memories of their childhood, their early educational experiences, unfulfilled dreams of a satisfying career or lifestyle, and feelings of inadequacy at not being able to help their own children learn.

To all of you, thank you for sharing your stories.

It is hoped that the information contained within this report will assist others to develop a deeper understanding and appreciation of the impact of low core skills on the everyday lives of Tasmanian adults, and that the Tasmanian Government and other service providers will be able to incorporate the findings of this research into the development of core skills programs and initiatives.

Finally, I'd like to thank all at TasCOSS, in particular the Industry Development Unit, for their ongoing support throughout this project.

I'd also like to acknowledge the Department of Education, particularly LINC Tasmania, for funding such an important and worthwhile project.

Karen Donnet-Jones

2011

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The primary purpose of this research was to capture the views, thoughts and ideas of Tasmanian adults with low core skills in order to gain a better understanding of what would motivate them to engage in core skills programs.

This qualitative research project consulted ninety (90) adult men and women across Tasmania. Thirty (30) of those adults were currently engaged in a literacy program and sixty (60) were disengaged, in the sense that they were not currently participating in any programs or activities to improve their core skills.

The research focused on four key areas:

- a) The impact of living with low core skills.
- b) The barriers that prevent or discourage adults from taking up core skills programs.
- c) The factors that have motivated or enabled adults to become engaged in core skills programs or that would motivate disengaged adults to undertake a core skills program.
- d) Identifying what would support the ongoing engagement and learning of adults within core skills programs.

Methodology

The research specifically targeted adults with low literacy with at least one or more of the following characteristics:

- a) Living in a rural and remote area.
- b) From a culturally and linguistically diverse background (CALD).

- c) From a low socio-economic background.
- d) Identifying as indigenous.
- e) Living with disability.
- f) Living with mental illness.

A qualitative research method was used to explore a range of issues relating to adults and core skills development. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with individuals, as well as some group interviews. Interviews were analysed for key themes and quotes are provided to illustrate these themes.

Summary of findings

Low core skills significantly impacted on the everyday lives of the majority of adults participating in this research. Many adults reported being unable to perform everyday tasks, and were limited in their capacity to fully participate in the workforce, and to contribute to and fully participate in family and community life. Many reported increased levels of stress, anxiety, depression and frustration, low self-confidence, and limited personal aspirations.

For many of the interviewees, living with low core skills was one of multiple factors that compounded to create a life of considerable disadvantage and exclusion. These issues included poverty, drug and alcohol problems, poor mental and physical health, and mental and physical disabilities.

However, many demonstrated considerable intelligence, resourcefulness and resilience in negotiating the world around them despite their lack of core skills. Many are very capable in other areas such as trades, crafts and spoken

communication, and told how they assisted others with fewer skills than themselves in literacy, numeracy and communication tasks.

Barriers to engaging in learning as an adult included:

- The social stigma and embarrassment associated with having low literacy.
- Ongoing impacts of early life experiences such as neglect or abuse and negative experiences of education or learning.
- Attitudes, beliefs and aspirations that limit motivation to learn.
- The belief that participating in learning would not lead to increased income and/or employment opportunities.
- The demands of raising children.
- Grief and stress associated with events such as divorce or the death of a spouse or child.
- Impacts of serious accidents and illness.
- Carer responsibilities for family members.
- The actual or perceived costs of attending a core skills program e.g. tuition fees, travel and childcare.
- The attitudes, requirements and inappropriateness of communication and technology of government and community programs.
- Lack of collaboration between organisations and services contributing to a lack of clear pathways between different

levels of education and between learning programs and work.

Factors that would motivate or enable adults to improve their core skills included:

- The simple desire to learn and improve their situation.
- The desire to stay connected with others, or reduce isolation.
- A desire to assist their own children to learn.
- Major life events such as the loss of a job, divorce, caring for others, or the death of a partner, child, sibling etc that made people reassess their lives.
- The quality of the learning environment, including availability of one on one tutoring, interested and responsive teachers, and relevant curricula.
- Locating programs in a venue in which they feel comfortable, such as home tutoring for some who lacked the confidence to attend a community facility, or in community venues such as men's sheds, sporting clubs or social clubs.
- The obligation to attend classes as a requirement of receiving a Centrelink pension or benefit.
- Demonstrating and/or believing that tangible benefits would flow directly from completing a program e.g. the guarantee of a job, or a pathway into work experience placements or other training.
- Financial incentives e.g. increased benefits or pensions, paying for travel and childcare costs.

- Promotion of the availability and benefits of core skills programs, avoiding the term 'literacy'. This was seen as particularly important by those from low socio-economic backgrounds or rural and remote areas.
- Working to change community attitudes to reduce the stigma and embarrassment associated with low core skills.

The research participants also identified a number of factors that would support ongoing engagement and learning. These included:

- Promotion of lifelong learning.
- Having programs that are ongoing and that have some stability and continuity in terms of staff was also very important.
- Having non-judgemental teachers who engage with learners as individuals and support them in the transitions between levels of education and from programs into work and other activities.
- Greater involvement of adults with low core skills in the design, development and delivery of core skills programs. Acknowledging the other skills and abilities they have acquired throughout their lives, and providing them with opportunities to assist others to improve their skills.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1 Reducing stigma and embarrassment

- Undertake a marketing campaign in order to shift community perceptions, reduce the stigma and embarrassment associated with having low core skills and disseminate information about the availability of core skills programs¹.
- Emphasise the strengths and skills of people with low core skills while also promoting the benefits of improving these core skills.
- Identify core skills champions to engage with adults and young people about their journey to improve their core skills and the changes in their lives that they have experienced as a result. These champions could have a role in the marketing campaign and talk at venues such as schools, youth centres, community centres, colleges, sporting clubs and community groups.
- Use language that helps to engage people with low core skills. Programs need to be promoted in a manner to appeal to people in target groups, emphasising concepts like 'enhancing people's skills' or 'life skills', and promoting learning as lifelong. The word 'literacy' should be avoided for specific programs, at least during the initial stages of engagement. Encourage people to bring a friend to core skills programs.

2 Involvement in the design, delivery, and evaluation of programs.

- Implement a sound consumer engagement process that involves people with low core skills in the design, delivery and evaluation of programs.
- Ensure that core skill program consumers (current and potential) are able to interact and communicate with program staff and other stakeholders in a process aiming to continuously improve core skills development.

3 Flexible program delivery

- Develop appropriate policies and guidelines in consultation with literacy providers to pilot a short-term home tutoring program for those who feel reluctant or unable to access services in public venues.
- Provide flexible options to accommodate a variety of life stages and circumstances:
 - hours – including evening and weekends.
 - training delivery – for example group and one-on-one.
 - types of venues not limited to formal learning environments e.g. community venues such as sporting clubs and men's sheds.
 - provision of childcare.

¹ LINC Tasmania is currently working to develop a brand for Adult Literacy Programs in Tasmania as part of the Tasmanian Adult Literacy Action Plan.

4 Referral to counselling and other support services

- Develop communication and referral pathways between core learning providers and other support services to:
 - assist individuals accessing core skills programs with other issues in their lives such as housing, drug and alcohol problems, physical and mental health.
 - help them deal with any stress and anxiety that attending core skills programs may trigger due to the resurfacing of past trauma that many individuals with low core skills have experienced and offer as a cause of their low skills.

5 Free or low-cost programs

- Provide programs that are no-cost or low-cost.
- Provide incentives through subsidised travel and other costs, such as childcare, associated with undertaking the training.

6 Creating pathways for learning

- Enable continuity of learning. Core skills programs should be designed and/or coordinated in a way that allows motivated individuals to continue their learning for sufficient time to consolidate their progress rather than imposing limitations on the number of hours programs can be accessed. This will require coordination between Centrelink, Job Services Australia providers and core skills program providers.
- Develop pathways to further education and training, or

employment. Develop or enhance mechanisms to assist people with low core skills to make the transition between stages of education, or from education and training into work. These transitions include the move from Year 10 into Year 11 or vocational education (Polytechnic); from training and literacy programs into other courses or university; or from literacy programs into work experience placements, voluntary work or employment.

7 Partnering with schools

- Core learning program providers, such as the LINC, partner with schools with the view to developing ongoing relationships with parents, grandparents and carers who want to improve their core skills in order to assist children to learn. There is a particular opportunity at the point where children first enter the education system as this may be one of the first time parents engage with services of any kind.
- Establish homework clubs in partnership with kindergartens and schools to assist parents to help their children with their schoolwork, for example, the program set up recently in Launceston by the Migrant Resource Centre in Northern Tasmania. Ideally such clubs would be universally available to remove stigma and maximise participation, but could be targeted at areas with lower literacy such as low socioeconomic areas and/or areas with high concentrations of CALD people. Such a program should flow on from initiatives such as Launching into Learning for pre-schoolers, and enable adults to improve their core

skills during the years their children attend primary school.

8 Supporting adults from CALD communities

- Employ more bilingual workers/ volunteers to support CALD adults on arrival and to reach those with limited English who are no longer engaged in core skills programs.
- Investigate more programs that provide opportunities for conversational English like the Launceston-based Volunteer Driver Training Courses run by Wheels for Work or Top Gear, run by the Migrant Resource Centre in Hobart, which provide volunteers to accompany CALD clients to increase driving hours.

9 Second Chance programs for people with convictions for petty crimes

- Reduce the impact that a conviction for petty crimes has on future learning and employment opportunities. This may include removing such convictions from criminal records and developing 'Second Chance' programs for adults with convictions. Such programs could assist those in this circumstance to work towards a new beginning through learning and employment, and may need to work with employers to reduce their reluctance to employ people with criminal records, as is done by some existing programs such as the youth employment program run by White Lion.

INTRODUCTION

Low levels of literacy and numeracy amongst Tasmanian adults has been of considerable concern for some time to the Tasmanian Government, educational institutions, employer bodies² and the general public. The Australian Bureau of Statistics found in their 2006 Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey, that 49% of Tasmanian adults aged 15-74 years lacked the literacy skills needed to cope with the demands of everyday life and work³. Further, there is little evidence to suggest that any significant improvements have occurred over the past 15 years, despite the best efforts of teachers and providers of core skills programs for adults⁴.

The issue of low core skills is frequently discussed and debated in the local media, especially in relation to the literacy and numeracy skills of Tasmanian children. The results of national core skills testing on children are keenly examined and compared with children's test results in other Australian states, yet assessing and addressing the needs of Tasmanian adults with low literacy levels has been far more challenging given that adults are generally more reluctant to seek help and in many cases actively hide their low core skills. Discussion and debate also continues in terms of the most effective way to engage and improve adult literacy levels.

The Tasmanian Government has developed a number of strategies in its Tasmanian Adult Literacy Action Plan 2010- 2015 to improve adult literacy levels⁵. One of these strategies is to establish a state-wide team of coordinators to recruit and train volunteer tutors to be matched with adults who possess low core skills. From all accounts, there appears to be no shortage of people willing to be trained as volunteer tutors and this is currently underway across all regions of Tasmania. The main challenge, however, appears to be how best to overcome the reluctance of adults living with low core skills to engage with literacy programs, or remain engaged long enough to achieve some measure of improvement in their core skills⁶.

There has been a significant amount of research looking at the reasons behind this reluctance to seek help; the research suggests that a primary cause of this lack of engagement is the embarrassment or stigma associated with having low core skills.

International research⁷ examining adult engagement in literacy programs has also found that many people who attend literacy programs come with negative experiences of earlier education or of authority figures,⁸ have histories of trauma and

² No more excuses: An industry response to the language, literacy and numeracy challenge, Industry Skills Councils, 2011.

³ ABS Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey, 2006.

⁴ Adult literacy levels measured in 1996.

⁵ Tasmanian Adult Literacy Action Plan, 2010- 2015.

⁶ Atkin, C, A Decade of Rural Research: What have We Learnt about Adult Language, Literacy and Numeracy Faculty of Education, Liverpool Hope University, International Education Studies Vol. 3, No. 4; November 2010.

⁷ Relating Adults' Lives and Learning: Participation and Engagement in Different Settings

⁸ Dymock, D Community adult language, literacy and numeracy provision in Australia: Diverse approaches and outcomes, Institute for Educational Research Griffith University, NCVET, 2007

in many cases were bullied at school, are living with poor health, or are carrying injuries.

Previous research has found that barriers to engaging in learning include physical, mental, social and emotional constraints. The research also points to social circumstances that result in unpredictable changes or turbulence in people's lives. Barriers that prevent adults from engaging in learning also include feeling different from others, feeling shame, humiliation and lacking confidence.⁹ Fearing negative peer perceptions or feeling there was a 'right time' to engage in learning which people had to identify for themselves, were also reasons why adults did not engage in learning. Other barriers focused on issues such as having many roles and responsibilities that led to shifting priorities and circumstances that often took priority over learning.

Practical restraints, such as the cost of childcare and travel costs, also impacted on engagement, as well as the negative connotations associated with the word 'literacy' which is often used in the title of many programs¹⁰.

In relation to engaging people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CALD) into the Vocational Educational and Training

sector, Judith Miralles¹¹ (2004) found that programs needed to provide clear pathways into employment, provide language support, acknowledge and address cultural issues and learners existing skills, have trainers who understand the issues faced by CALD learners and include work experience in the training.

This research explores the experience of living with low literacy or core skills within the context of the mainstream community and the effects that low literacy has on people's lives and on their immediate family.

Adults were also asked what could be done to help reduce the embarrassment or stigma associated with having low core skills, as well as the kinds of supports that could be put in place to support ongoing participation into further education and training.

This project sought to capture the voices of Tasmanian adults living with low core skills, to seek their thoughts and ideas about what could be done to increase the uptake of existing literacy support and training programs, and to share their ideas with respect to developing new programs which would appeal to them.

⁹ Skills for Communities, Skills for life, Department of Education and Skills, UK, 2005

¹⁰ Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program 2010-2013 Overview Paper Foundation Skills and Pathways Branch, DEEWR

¹¹ A fair go: factors impacting on vocational education and training participation and completion in selected ethnic communities, ALRP (2004)

The research also sought to discover what would motivate people from a variety of different backgrounds and circumstances to seek the help and support they need, and then what would maintain their motivation and interest over time to ensure that they remained engaged and achieved their particular learning goals.

Through engaging with people with one or more of the following characteristics: low socio-economic status, migrant background, living with disabilities and/or mental illness and those living in rural and remote areas, it was anticipated that specific barriers could be identified and ideas gathered with respect to overcoming these barriers.

It is important to note at the outset that people do not fall neatly into one category or the other, and that the issues that impact on their ability, desire or capacity to undertake literacy programs are often various and in many cases, complex.

Terminology

The terms '**core skills**' and '**literacy**' are used throughout this report interchangeably and encompass the key skills described in the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF)¹² of literacy, numeracy, reading, oral communication and learning. For the purpose of this research:

Low core skills refers to the equivalent of Level 1 and 2 of the ACSF.

Engaged/engagement refers to participation in adult literacy programs.

Disengaged/disengagement refers to a lack of participation in adult literacy programs.

¹² Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF)

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research method was used to explore a range of issues relating to adults and core skills development. This method was chosen as it was deemed to be the most appropriate approach for capturing the 'voices' of adults living with low core skills.

Research Design

Participants for this research include both engaged (currently attending some form of literacy program) and disengaged adults (people with low core skills not accessing literacy programs).

It was anticipated that useful information might be gleaned from engaged adults with respect to motivational triggers, overcoming barriers, and from any notable differences that could be made between them and disengaged adults. It was hypothesised that the engaged group were in a position to consider what factors led them to engage in an adult literacy program, while disengaged adults could provide reasons why they chose not to engage.

Research Time Frame

The research was conducted from 21st March to the 30th June 2011.

Target Groups

The research aimed to consult adults with at least one or more of the following characteristics:

- a) Living in a rural and remote area.
- b) From a culturally and linguistically diverse background (CALD).
- c) From a low socio-economic background.

- d) Identifying as indigenous.
- e) Living with disability.
- f) Living with mental illness.

Recruiting Adults

ABS statistics were used to identify geographical areas with the lowest levels of functional literacy across the State. Information was also sought through consultations with LINC Coordinators located in 16 Local Government Areas across Tasmania and from community or neighbourhood houses, employment agencies and other community organisations within each region.

An equal number of locations were selected within each of the geographical regions: North West, North East, South East and South West.

Interviews were conducted in each region at suitable facilities, including libraries, community houses, coffee shops, people's homes, men's sheds, work places or at other community organisations, such as Mission Australia.

The TasCOSS state-wide network of over 250 'not for profit' community organisations was used to identify and access potential adults in both the engaged and disengaged groups. Other avenues to locate adults who were disengaged from all mainstream services included cold canvassing at shopping centres, public libraries, malls, and outside Centrelink offices and other public areas.

The researcher used a series of questions during the initial stages of each interview to determine the interviewee's performance level for

each of the core skills. The answers provided were assessed against the criteria listed in the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF). Adults who described their performance in the range of Level 1 or 2 were included in the research. Adults who described being able to perform tasks that met Level 3 criteria or above in one or more core skill areas were excluded from the research.

Further assessments used to ascertain interviewees' core skills level included observing them read the research information sheet, noting how much assistance they required to understand the content of the Information Sheet and Consent Form, and noting the degree of difficulty they had in writing their name and date on the Consent Form.

Changes

It became increasingly apparent midway through the research that it was taking too long to find the 60 disengaged adults within the allocated time without some form of incentive. A decision was made, in consultation with LINC Tasmania, to reduce the number of interview locations in favour of purchasing \$30 gift cards to give to each disengaged adult who was willing to be interviewed. This change proved to be successful, and added a certain dignity to the exchange of such personal and at times unsettling information.

Individual Interviews

For many people with low literacy, the fear of being stigmatised, embarrassed or even shamed was foremost in their minds. Therefore,

the majority of people involved in this research were interviewed individually, in a private space.

Interviews were semi-structured and generally went for one hour in duration. Where there was a need to establish a greater rapport with participants before commencing the formal interview, an additional amount of time was spent with each person discussing an array of topics that helped the person to relax. Depending on the individual, the situation and the number of people involved, the duration of the interviews varied between 30 minutes to 1 ½ hours.

In some instances, it was necessary to spend additional time with interviewees immediately post interview. This often occurred when interviewees touched on prior traumatic experiences, such as being subjected to some form of physical, sexual and emotional abuse, or prior experiences of being bullied, or the feelings of shame and embarrassment associated with their low literacy.

A small number of people became mildly upset when describing some of the current difficulties in their lives, such as the recent death of a partner, divorce, and the demands of caring for children, or feeling overwhelmed or isolated.

Interviewees were offered access to ongoing professional support if it was required.

Some group interviews were also held. These lasted from 1 to 2 ½ hours and were held at Mission Australia in Launceston, Burnie and Hobart.

DATA COLLECTION

All interviews were recorded with the explicit verbal and written consent of each adult participant. Information sheets were offered to all participants. However, all of the information was also provided verbally given that some adults were not able to read the information sheet.

Each adult was informed that the information collected would be kept in a secure location, and then destroyed after it had been transcribed.

Demographic Data

Non-identifying demographic data was collected to ensure that those included in the research met the specific target characteristics of interest. The demographic information included each adult's age, gender, geographical location, type of pension/benefit, language spoken at home, place of birth, work and education history and whether they were identified as Aboriginal, or were living with a mental illness or disability. Table 1 summarises the participant's demographic characteristics.

The age of the adults in the engaged and disengaged groups ranged from 18 to 72 years. The majority of people consulted in the engaged group were in their 30's and 40's, and the majority of people in the disengaged group were in their 20's and 40's.

Under each quotation throughout this report there is a short description indicating whether the adult was engaged or disengaged, and their gender, age group, and general location in Tasmania.

Engaged and Disengaged Adults

Thirty (30) adults currently engaged in literacy programs were interviewed and are referred to in this report as the 'engaged group'. A further sixty (60) adults who were not currently undertaking any form of literacy program were interviewed and are referred to as the 'disengaged group'.

It should be noted that the adults in the disengaged group were referred to as 'disengaged' as they were not currently attending any literacy programs. A number of these adults were employed or enrolled in other types of training programs.

There were 16 women and 14 men in the 'engaged group', and 44 women and 16 men in the 'disengaged group'.

Region

Approximately two thirds of the engaged (63%) and disengaged (68%) groups were living in urban areas and the remaining third were living in rural and remote regions throughout Tasmania (See Table 2).

Aboriginal people interviewed

There were six Aboriginal women who participated in this research, and all were in the disengaged group. There may have been other Aboriginal adults who were consulted in this research, but they did not identify themselves as such. Interviews were conducted at an Aboriginal service in the south of the state.

Table 1 : Demographic Characteristics of Engaged and Disengaged Adults

Variable	Category	Engaged (n=30)		Disengaged (n=60)		Total (n=90)	
		#	%	#	%	#	%
Gender	Female	16	53%	44	73%	60	67%
	Male	14	47%	16	27%	30	33%
Age	18 - 29	5	17%	16	2%	21	23%
	30 - 39	12	40%	10	17%	22	24%
	40 - 49	6	20%	21	35%	27	30%
	50 - 59	4	13%	9	15%	13	14%
	60 - 72	3	10%	4	6%	7	8%
Locality	Urban	19	63%	41	68%	60	67%
	Rural/Remote	11	37%	19	32%	30	33%
1st Language	English	16	53%	50	83%	66	73%
	Other	14	47%	10	17%	24	27%
CALD	Yes	14	47%	12	20%	26	29%
	No	16	53%	48	80%	64	71%
Socio-Economic Status	Employed (FT, PT or Casual)	3	10%	17	28%	20	22%
	Benefit/Pension	27	90%	43	72%	70	78%
Disability Pension	Physical	1	3%	6	10%	7	8%
	Intellectual	3	10%	1	2%	4	4%
Mental Illness	Depression/Anxiety	13	44%	16	27%	29	32%
	Other: Bipolar OCD	1	3%	2	3%	3	3%

Table 2 : Locations of Engaged and Disengaged Participants

Region	Engaged (n=30)		Disengaged (n=60)	
	#	%	#	%
North / North West / East Greater Launceston, Deloraine, Exeter, Burnie, Devonport, Lebrina, Scottsdale, St Helens	16	54 %	15	25 %
Greater Hobart / Northern Suburbs / Rural Towns Moonah, Bridgewater, Glenorchy, Lutana, Chigwell, Claremont, Montrose, Brighton, New Norfolk	6	20 %	26	43 %
South East Suburbs /Region Sorell, Rokeby, Risdon Vale, Old Beach, Lindsifame, Gagebrook	1	3%	16	27 %
South West Suburbs / Region Kingston, Huonville, Geeveston	7	23 %	3	5%

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD)

Those with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds came from 16 different countries and were interviewed individually or in small groups. The majority of CALD interviewees were engaged in some form of learning, with a smaller number disengaged from core skills learning.

Socio-economic status

Table 1 indicates that the majority of engaged (90%) and disengaged (72%) adults were receiving a Government pension or benefit. Only 10% of engaged and 28% of disengaged adults were in any paid employment and most of this work was either part time or casual. Only eight (13%) of the adults in the disengaged group were currently in full time work.

Apart from a few exceptions, the majority of people were working in relatively low skilled and low paid jobs, such as cleaning, kitchen hand, retail, etc. (See Table 4).

To ensure that the adults being recruited for this research were from low socio-economic backgrounds, previous employment data was also collected. The previous employment data shows that the majority of people had only ever worked in relatively low paid and low skilled occupations (See Table 3).

Disabilities

There were four adults in the engaged group and six adults in the disengaged group who were currently

receiving a disability pension for either an intellectual or physical disability.

Approximately one third of adults in the engaged group (nine or 30%) reported having a learning disability, or more specifically had been diagnosed with dyslexia, whereas only three people (5%) in the disengaged group reported having dyslexia, and one person described short term memory problems as a result of a car accident when he was an adolescent.

There were a number of others in both groups that were not in receipt of a disability pension, but reported suffering from one or more health conditions i.e. back pain, joint injuries/arthritis, migraines and injuries related to car accidents or physical assaults.

Caring for Children

Information was gathered on the number of adults who were currently caring for children at home. This included all children up to 18 years (including fostered children) and adult children over 18 years that needed ongoing care by their parent/s or carer.

Table 4 shows that 50% of engaged and 48% of disengaged adults were caring for children at home. Interestingly, the total number of children being cared for by the 15 engaged adults was 24, an average of 1.6 children per adult. This compared to a total of 80 children being cared for by 29 adults in the disengaged group, or 2.7 children per adult. The data indicates the parents in the disengaged group were caring for significantly more children than those parents in the engaged group.

Table 3 : Income Source, Current and Previous Employment of Engaged and Disengaged Adults

Variable	Category	Engaged (n=30)		Disengaged (n=60)	
		#	%	#	%
Type of Pension	Disability	4	13	6	10
	Sole parent	6	20	5	8
	Unemployment	16	54	23	38
	Aged pension	1	3	4	7
	Parenting Payment	3	10	10	17
	Youth / study Allow	-	-	2	3
	Dependent	-	-	1	2
Working Hours	Fulltime	-	-	8	13
	Part time	2	6	10	17
	Casual	1	3	2	3
	Work for the Dole	-	-	1	2
Current Employment	Cleaning	1	3	3	5
	Supermarket	-	-	3	5
	Gardening	-	-	1	2
	Supported Employment	1	3	-	-
	Admin/office	-	-	2	3
	Kitchen Hand	1	3	1	2
	Childcare	-	-	2	3
	Pharmacy	-	-	1	2
	Retail	-	-	2	3
Other	-	-	3	5	
Previous Occupation	Hospitality	2	6	7	12
	Cleaning	1	3	5	8
	Factory/low skilled	4	13	5	8
	Skilled /Semi Prof	3	10	5	8
	Admin /office	-	-	7	12
	Carer /Childcare	-	-	2	3
	Trade e.g. Butcher	1	3	3	5
	Teachers Aide	-	-	-	-
	Retail	2	6	10	17
	Driver i.e. taxi /truck	-	-	1	2
	Health /Disability	1	3	7	12
	Services	1	3	2	3
	Gardening	1	3	1	2
	Supported employment	2	-	1	-

Table 4 : Engaged and Disengaged Adults Caring for Children

	Engaged	Disengaged
Caring for children under 18yrs	15 (50%)	29 (48%)
Not caring for children under 18yrs	15 (50%)	25 (42%)

Education and Training

The level of primary and secondary education ranged from no schooling at all, right through to completing Year 12, as shown in Table 5. All post secondary education and training is shown in Table 6. One adult reported holding a Bachelors degree obtained in Australia, and a further three people from a CALD background reported holding a degree or diploma level qualification obtained from overseas. Only a small proportion of both engaged and disengaged adults

reported completing other certificate or vocational education courses through TAFE or other organisations.

It is important to note that the level of education reached does not necessarily translate into higher levels of core skills. For example, there were interviewees who held a Year 12 Tasmanian Certificate of Education, or equivalent, who appeared to have less functional literacy than other adults with only a Year 8 level of education.

Table 5 : Level of Primary and Secondary Education

Highest Level of Primary or Secondary Education	Location	Number (30) Engaged	%	Number (60) Disengaged	%
No Education	Other Country	2	6	1	2
Primary	Grade 1	1	3	-	-
	Grade 2	-	-	2	3
	Grade 4	-	-	3	5
Secondary	Year 7	2	6	-	-
	Year 8	4	13	1	2
	Year 9	3	10	10	17
	Year 10	5	6	23	38
	Year 11	1	3	5	8
College	Year 12	4	-	15	25
Completed High School *	Other Country	8	-	-	-

* Completing High School overseas does not necessarily equate to Year 10 in Australia.

Table 6 : Further Education and Training

Other Education / Training	Location	Number Engaged	%	Number Disengaged	%
University: Degree or Diploma	Australia	-	-	1	2
	Other Country	1	3	2	-
Other Education: Hairdressing, Secretarial	Australia	-	-	-	2
	Other Country	2	6	-	1
Apprenticeship/ Traineeship	Current	-	-	-	-
	Previous	1	3	3	5
Certificate Courses: Retail, Disability, Teacher's Aide	Current	1	3	-	-
	Previous	2	6	23	38
Other Short courses: Licences: Forklift, Rigging	Current	-	-	-	-
	Previous	4	13	1	2
Employer Training	Current	-	-	-	-
	Previous	3	10	5	8
Training programs by community organisations, e.g. U-Turn, Cosmos	Current	2	6	-	-
	Previous	-	-	1	2
Adult literacy programs	Current	30	-	-	-
	Previous	4	13	5	8
Migrant English Classes	Current	9	30	-	-
	Previous	-	-	5	8

1 LIVING WITH LOW LITERACY

This section has summarised the impacts of low literacy on the lives of many Tasmanian adults on a daily basis.

1.1 Embarrassment and Stigma

Perhaps the most important issue to emerge from the consultations was the feeling of embarrassment that people carried with them as a result of having low core skills. People also spoke about the stigma associated with having low core skills, and the dominant view in society, that if you lack core skills, then you must be unintelligent. The following quote is typical of the comments made about the embarrassment and stigma associated with low literacy.

If I'm talking to someone and they say 'what you are doing' and I say 'I'm doing' a numeracy / literacy course', they say 'Oh, are you dumb?'... you wouldn't say it because you'd be embarrassed.

Engaged man 60 yrs South

Other adults described living with low literacy as feeling different from, and separate to, the mainstream community. The feeling of being different and devalued is powerfully described by one young disengaged woman from northern Tasmania.

The way I see it all of the people who can read and write are like, say, the motherboard of a computer and people like me, we are the viruses on the outside wanting to get in but the people in the motherboard are doing everything they can to keep us out. To get rid of the viruses.

Disengaged woman 25 yrs North

For some adults their feelings of disconnectedness and rejection had led them to become seriously depressed with a few people disclosing that in the past their depression had been so severe that they had considered or attempted suicide.

Others talked about the amount of stress and anxiety they experienced trying to prevent others from finding out that they have low core skills. Many people spoke about avoiding situations which could potentially expose them, others talked about making all kinds of excuses, e.g. 'I left my glasses in the car', etc., to ensure that nobody found out about their low core skills.

I've had my own businesses and I've just recently sold two cafes that I've had here in Tasmania. I worked overseas a lot for businesses, I set up companies overseas. I do all that sort of thing and in a lot of the ways I've got around it (low literacy). For instance, people look at me as being very clever because they don't know. We're talking up until I came here and I'm what 56, 57yrs. There are probably half a dozen people in the world that know that I can't read and write properly.

Engaged man 57 yrs South

A number of people, especially the men in each group, described their efforts to hide their low literacy as 'bluffing their way through life'. Others spoke of themselves as being 'con men' or 'a master of excuses', and others talked of elaborate plans and actions they had taken to ensure that their secret remained concealed from others.

Centrelink knew I needed help. I was embarrassed – as you are – but the thing was that it was a matter of getting from my country to here and I bluffed everything. Yeah, I just learnt how to sign my name, print it, not write it.

Engaged man 49 yrs (CALD) South West

Although many adults felt alienated from mainstream society because of their low literacy, others were quick to point out that the problem of low literacy was widespread within the Tasmania community.

I know thousands and thousands of people out there who can't read and write. I think every second guy in [my town] is the same as me.

Engaged man 49 yrs South West

1.2 Employment

Exclusion from employment opportunities is one of the major effects of living with low core literacy. It is difficult to find work if you can't access employment notices, are unable to write a resume or fill in a form. Some people spoke about not being able to pursue a career because of their low core skills and many people stated that they did not see themselves being able to go back and learn the specific core skills that could help them realise their dream.

There are people who nonetheless have been able to find jobs but they often found that they could not take up opportunities for promotion or moving to more responsible and better paid positions. Several

people expressed disappointment at having left employment or refused opportunities to take up more senior positions or promotions because of their fear that if they did others would find out about their low core skills.

I've been offered positions in companies where I've had to turn them down and walk away without anyone knowing how, when or why - not being able to understand why you would do that. It's just that I knew it was the next level and I knew that I'd have trouble with it. It was better to get out before anyone found out.

Engaged man 45 yrs South

Others described low or no support at work, with employers being unwilling to spend any time assisting employees to understand.

Employers don't want to spend the time explaining things to us – they think it takes too long.

Engaged man 49 yrs North

Some adults spoke about the shifting nature of work in Australian society and how they had personally been affected by these changes. Many agreed that in the past there were a greater number of jobs for people with a range of abilities. People with low core skills felt that these changes had caused many people to 'fall between the cracks'.

Back then there were jobs for people like us and it was considered that that's fine. You'll never be a this or that but that's ok, it was accepted and that was it... now you've got to have a degree just to sell those tickets at the railway station. It's something

we've developed and done and we've... just pushed people, who haven't got the skills, under rocks all over the place.

Engaged man 57 yrs Kingston

My mum only went to Year 9 then she went straight into a job. Years ago you could do that but now they want all this reading and writing and there's nothing, no jobs you can go into.

Engaged man 18 yrs Gagebrook

1.3 People from CALD Backgrounds Living with Low Literacy

Most of the people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds who were consulted for this research were either learning English or attending literacy programs. People from CALD backgrounds with low literacy in either their first or second language did not express embarrassment or see themselves as being unintelligent. Low literacy in their first language was nearly always attributed to external factors like lack of educational opportunities available in their country of origin.

It is, however, important to note that a more detailed study of people from CALD backgrounds would need to be undertaken to be able to come to a stronger conclusion about their attitudes to literacy.

The adults from CALD backgrounds interviewed for this study generally found it easier to talk about their literacy needs than their Australian-born counterparts, and most were highly motivated to learn. The following quotes are typical of how engaged CALD adults describe their

feelings about the importance of learning English:

Because Australia is an English speaking country even if you go to the supermarket, or post office we have to know the English and sometimes people have to use the telephone and that's very hard, so we realise how very important it is and we are very interested to learn.

Engaged man 29 yrs (CALD) North

... the majority of peoples who cannot read and write, they don't have much embarrassment because they realise in their time it was like that, our place was like that. It was a poor country so it is okay because we are coming from that poor country... In my grandfather's time there wouldn't be any school at that time. If there wasn't any school, how can you feel bad about it?

Engaged man 29 yrs (CALD) North

1.4 Impact of Low Core Skills on Daily living

Living with low core skills affected people's lives in a variety of ways. This generally depended on the area/s of low core skills they had most difficulty with, that is, reading, writing, spelling, numeracy, learning, oral communication skills and technology. The amount of help and support available from family and friends also determined the level of impact low literacy had on their everyday lives.

For some, low core skills profoundly affected their daily lives and their opportunity to engage fully in everyday activities. For others having low core skills caused relatively few difficulties, either because activities

requiring a particular core skill would be avoided, or they had found some other way to 'get around it'.

1.4.1 Low Reading Skills

Adults with low reading skills frequently spoke of getting someone to assist them with filling in forms or helping them read instructions, for example, on a computer screen or if an email arrived. Some people spoke about looking as though they were reading the newspaper, but mostly they were looking at the pictures in order to make sense of the news stories.

Sometimes with information and forms you've got to decipher it down into your own language. I ask mum to decipher things down into my language.

Disengaged woman 37 yrs South

I been coming (to literacy) since just before Christmas so, a few months. I must admit it was through an employment situation where I had to fill out forms and I was having trouble filling out the forms. This [literacy class] was something that was suggested to me.

Engaged man 57 yrs South

1.4.2 Low Writing Skills

Writing was generally an activity that many, especially disengaged adults, said that they actively avoided.

The exception to this was texting, often short and simple messages on mobile phones or using a computer and relying heavily on the spell check facility. Otherwise, many adults stated that they rarely wrote anything down.

I hate writing but if I have to I can put it down on paper. I got help from the women at [employment agency] last time I had to write something.

Disengaged woman 48 yrs South

I didn't know how to do things [fill in a form, etc] I had to go next door or spell it out and put the words together. Neighbours and friends would help me. I reckon I've started to get my things right but I don't know how to put dots or commas, question marks and the full stops, I don't know where to put them in.

Engaged woman 57 yrs South

I try not to write things... because I find that a bit too tough

Engaged man 18 yrs South

1.4.3 Low Numeracy Skills

The vast majority of both engaged and disengaged adults described having difficulties with day-to-day activities that required basic numeracy skills. Knowing what change to give someone, how much money to pay for a ticket on public transport or understanding the cost of discounted food items in the supermarket, were challenging activities for many adults.

I do struggle with my maths a bit sometimes. I have trouble working out how much change to give.

Disengaged woman 33 yrs South

I read better than doing maths. I have no concept of maths – I can't read my own bank statements.

Disengaged woman 42 yrs (Disability)
North East

1.4.4 Low Literacy and Technology

Using technology such as computers and mobile phones also presented challenges for people with low core skills.

Although in recent years schools have increased the number of computers available for students, many people with low core skills either didn't learn computer skills at school, or if they did, they didn't have access to a computer at home to reinforce and build on their computer skills.

Some adults described accessing computers at local libraries if they could not afford a personal computer. Others who had a computer at home either struggled to use it on their own or could not access the computer, because others in their household would dominate the time available to use it.

Some adults described spending hours trying to work out how to use computers by themselves, usually through trial and error, because they did not want others to know how limited their computer skills were. One woman described spending over four hours one evening with her husband trying to work out how to send a single email to her husband's boss. The boss had casually asked her husband to send him some information in an email unaware that he had never sent an email before.

I'm still coming here to learn things... to spell... how to add up properly... and to learn the computer... I've got a computer... but I don't know how to turn it on.

Engaged woman 57 yrs South

One young man described his experience when he goes to Centrelink and suggests that there needs to be more help available for people with limited computer skills.

When you go to Centrelink they tell you to do an update on the computers but I don't know how to use a computer, not really. At school they only let me do art and PE so I never got to use the computer. They should have someone at Centrelink to show you how to use the computers.

Engaged man 18 yrs South

1.4.5 Oral Communication Skill

Whilst there were some Australian-born adults who expressed a desire to improve their oral communication skills, most were adults from a CALD background.

The most difficult thing for me is to communicate with people. People sometimes do not understand me, my pronunciation. They say 'uh-uh, you have to say things a different way. I'm wanting to improve my confidence.

Engaged woman 50 yrs (CALD) South

Many people from CALD backgrounds stated that they had limited opportunities to practise speaking English outside classes. Others said that they lacked the confidence to try to speak English when they were away from classes.

1.5 Getting Help with Low Core Skills

Both groups were asked who they turn to for assistance when they are struggling with low core skills. The principal people who assisted with daily life activities were family, friends, partners and/or children.

Others mentioned organisations such as Centrelink, social workers, employment agencies, community houses, teachers and volunteer tutors.

1.5.1 Who helps in everyday life?

If I get a letter in the mail I get my mum to help me. She tells me what I need to do. Sometimes if I'm out I have to bring a form home so she can read it for me.

When I go to Centrelink they help me to fill in forms and stuff.

Engaged man 18 yrs South

Mostly I'm ok (with everyday life). If I need help I ask friends to help me with forms and things.

Engaged woman 50's (CALD) South

I sometimes have trouble with forms and things like that. It just depends on what they are. With big words, if that happens I just ring up and ask whoever it is. If they can explain a little more about this and most people are happy to do that.

Disengaged woman 20's South

I get my kids to help me with Centrelink because I'm just learning how to do that.

Disengaged woman 40's South

1.5.2 Family Members and Friends with Low Core Skills

Many people talked about other family members and friends with lower functional literacy than themselves.

Many interviewees regarded their own literacy problems as far less problematic when compared with others they knew.

I had a teacher come back to the school farm and help me read for half an hour but my brother never got any help and hasn't gone to school for the past 3 years because he's been with the welfare, so he can't read or write at all

When my brother leaves a message my mum has to ask him, 'What you trying to say boy?' because he can't read or write.

Engaged man 18 yrs South

Mum tried to help my brother but he'd get really shitty with her so I have to do it. I help him do stuff.

I think that computers are the best thing that ever happened because my brother will get on Facebook and he'll write to his friends and he's actually got more help from me doing that than he got from doing that course.

My brother doesn't know how to handle money. If he needs to catch a bus I have to go with him to pay the fare.

Disengaged woman 18 yrs South

1.5.3 Helping Other Adults with Low Core Skills

Adults in both the engaged and disengaged groups frequently described assisting other adult family members and friends with low core skills, in this way many people with low core skills act as literacy tutors for others in the community – often those with the least functional literacy.

My dad has trouble with literacy. He went right through school but it never stuck in his head. He can read certain things. If I text dad he can read it and he'll text me back with a straight no or yes. He also reads the motoring section in the paper but he gets me to finish it. Me and mum help my dad to do things he wants to do.

It's just his reading and writing he has trouble with. He has a job. Dad has to put his form into Centrelink on the internet and me or mum have to do that because he's got no idea how to do that. My dad did do a literacy class but it didn't help him.

Disengaged woman 27 yrs South

I've currently got staff that I bullied to do a course. One girl in particular really wasn't keen, and I said if you do it I'll support you. If you need me to work one on one with you, if you want to get the other girls together and you want me too, as part of that, we can work it out you know. And she's ok with that. We already had a relationship.

Disengaged woman 46 yrs South

My husband can't do any form or anything. Everything he brings to me. He doesn't want to look after anything like that.

Engaged Woman 50 yrs (CALD)

1.5.4 CALD - Helping Others with Learning

My mother-in-law and my sister come here too, but they don't come much to English because in my country, I understand it is tough, it's very hard, but I help them even though my English is not very good.

Engaged woman 32 (CALD) South West

2 BARRIERS TO LEARNING CORE SKILLS

This section looks more closely at the barriers that prevent many adults with low literacy taking up core skills programs.

2.1 Embarrassment /Stigma

As mentioned at the beginning of the previous chapter, one of the main effects of low literacy on people's lives (possibly excluding those from CALD backgrounds) is the embarrassment and stigma associated with low core skills.

Most adults wanted to avoid any situation which could draw attention to their low core skills.

One man who had spent most of his life disengaged from learning core skills describes why it is so hard for people to seek help with their low literacy.

This is why the majority of people, I feel, are not coming in even though they require it because it's embarrassing. It's an embarrassing thing, it's something that I've got around over the years but it's very, very embarrassing and for that reason it's so hard to get people in.

Engaged man 57 yrs South

The majority of adults in the engaged and disengaged groups believed that the rest of the community looked down on people with low literacy, believing that they must be 'dumb'. The following statements were typical of the sorts of views people shared about their fears of being stigmatized by others.

I just think that they think we're dummies. Well what did we go to school for? You see it puts us down and it frustrates us and we get depressed over it... Well what's the use then? then shove it, you know where you can go and we'll have nothing to do with it.

Disengaged woman 48 yrs South

I look at it like they [literacy volunteers] are going to be teaching us but they're thinking that they're teaching us because we're dumb. I don't think that's fair.

Disengaged woman 38 yrs South

People who lack literacy skills make up for it in different ways. The idea that someone is dumb is so stupid.

Disengaged woman 35 yrs (Indigenous)
South

The fear of being stigmatised by others was mentioned more often by adults living in country areas throughout Tasmania. There was a view that if others in country towns found out that a person had low core skills, they were more likely to be ridiculed, teased, bullied or the subject of 'town gossip'.

It's very difficult in a small town to match volunteers in literacy because people are just too embarrassed to admit they have a need.

Disengaged woman 50 yrs (Rural/Remote)
North East

More worried about the stigma, the stigma's the killer. They need to get more creative and call it something else. Around here there's a small town mentality, they don't get into these

sorts of things [literacy] in case they get exposed. They move out of their community to do things because if people found out they would lose respect for them. There is fear of being found out.

Disengaged man 60 yrs (Rural/ Remote)
South

You wouldn't go to your local community. No, I rather come into Hobart – nobody knows me here.

Engaged man 55 yrs (Rural/ Remote)
South

2.2 Early Life Experiences

2.2.1 Early Trauma

An increasing body of knowledge has emerged over the past decade that demonstrates the long-term negative impact of early trauma on children. In recent years a number of initiatives like the Child and Family Centres and funding of specific projects in disadvantaged areas have been set up in Tasmania to help prevent and reduce the trauma of young children and to provide better support to families and communities. Early life experiences do have an impact on literacy skills.

Many of the adults with low core skills who were consulted for this research described growing up in difficult or traumatic family circumstances. Both engaged and disengaged adults believed that these early experiences not only had a negative impact on their ability to acquire core skills at a young age, but also that these early experiences continue to influence their engagement in learning, as adults.

When I was young and going to school, I'd have to go home and do homework at the kitchen table. My father would stand behind me and ask questions. I could answer them up to a point and then my mind would go blank... every time I got one wrong he would smack me across the back of my head. Sometimes he hit me so hard that the front of my head would hit the table. He'd also tell me how dumb I was.

Disengaged woman 46 yrs South

... I went between different foster homes for most of my early years then I decided to find my real mother... she was living in poverty and one of the foster carers had banked some money for me – it was probably about \$800 – but my real mum had a gambling problem and stole all of my money. Then my older brother raped me and after that I just lost it. I started taking drugs to cope.

Engaged woman 43 yrs North West

Some adults described lives where they had gone from one traumatic experience to another. The following quote describes one woman's life experiences before she was finally able to start learning core skills for the first time, in her fifties.

... at 15 I had a baby and just left home. I had 5 children by the time I was 21 then I had cervix [sic] cancer. I raised all my sisters' kids (5) as well after she died when she was 26.

I had a husband till 1981 then I got married again in '93 and I left him because I wanted custody of the kids. He was bashing them and bashing me and then after 6 to 8 weeks they wanted to go back to dad so I sent them back.

My eldest is fifteen years younger than me so he'd be 43 or something. I never see them – they're all over on the mainland -except my 19 yr old son – he died on a road at 19.

Engaged woman 58 yrs South

For many, one of the legacies of experiencing adverse events in early childhood is a lack of confidence in adulthood. Adults in the disengaged group were more likely to report that their greatest barrier to engaging in literacy programs was their lack of confidence.

That's like my son. He can't read and write. In my son's case, I think he lacks confidence. Yeah, I lack confidence too. It's like I wanted to get a driver's licence but I'm not very confident on the road. It's a big downfall if you haven't got confidence – that's when I just cut off, back away.

Disengaged woman 42 yrs South

Adults who were currently engaged in literacy programs also saw their lack of confidence as the main reason why they hadn't engaged in literacy programs at an earlier time in their lives. Many adults reported that their confidence had increased dramatically since they commenced attending literacy programs.

For other adults in the disengaged group, the idea of taking up any form of learning was enough to raise their anxiety levels to an uncomfortable degree.

Fear and anxiety was particularly common in adults who had been told as children that they were 'dumb' and also for those who had experienced negative events such as bullying at school when they were children.

I wanted to go to uni but I get anxiety just thinking about it. I start to have an asthma attack. I think it's a fear of failure. I have tried to take up courses at home, online but I haven't done anything other than enrol. I thought it would be better to do it at home by myself but it doesn't seem to make any difference. I still suffer huge anxiety.

Disengaged woman 46 yrs South

Many adults from chaotic and abusive home environments described going to school as a form of respite, where school became a safe haven away from the difficulties that existed at home.

I did like school. I couldn't handle the holidays. I just loved it. I loved going to school. I hated being home.

Disengaged woman 48 yrs South

2.2.2 Early Educational Experiences

Both engaged and disengaged adults expressed a range of positive and negative views about their early educational experiences, however most expressed a dislike of school and left the education system as soon as possible.

Most of the reasons given for disliking school related to particular experiences with school staff or being subjected to bullying by other students. Many identified these early experiences as the reason why they now have low core skills as an adult.

I got on really well with the sports teachers because they loved me for sport but you give me an English teacher – I was a dummy – and he'd

embarrass you by making you read out to the class and he'd give you a hard book to start off with. If you got a word wrong the other kids would be laughing at you. So you dropped down to the next level and you've had enough so you throw a tantrum and then you get kicked out of school.

Engaged man 49 yrs (CALD)
South West

I hated school. I was bashed up all the time, tormented.

Disengaged woman 47 yrs South

Both engaged and disengaged adults stated that they did not get enough help from teachers during their early education. Many felt that this lack of help impacted on their motivation to return to further education later in life.

That's why I left in grade 10, no one helped me. I knew others like me and we didn't get any help. We were just taken out to play sport.

Disengaged man 47 yrs North East

Some adults described early experiences at school where they felt they were treated differently from other students. Some of this 'special treatment' may have even been well intentioned, but it seems that the longer term impact was detrimental for many adults.

... I had rheumatic fever as a child. We're talking grade three... so for quite a long time it was 'poor me'. You know what I mean, you're having trouble there... 'just go sit in the corner for a little while'... and by the end of the day I don't think they did me any favours what-so-ever... you either sat in a corner... because there was a sad story... or because you were in

trouble... either way you still didn't get to do anything.

Engaged man 57 yrs South

2.2.3 Learning Difficulties and Disability

A number of adults in both the engaged and disengaged groups described being perplexed as to why they have had so much trouble learning, especially compared to their peers. Many of these adults did not find out until much later in life, that they had a learning disability, such as dyslexia, which they were never tested for as a child.

For these individuals being separated from the rest of the class to attend 'special classes' was often a deeply humiliating experience which also prompted cruel taunts and bullying from other students. These adults were at a loss when it came to understanding why it was that they had so many problems when it came to learning. As this man states these were the children that ended up the back of the classroom and often they became the most disruptive members of the class.

I'm on a disability pension because I have trouble reading and writing and I was tested for dyslexia and I've got that.

My tutor comes in here on Tuesday and she was the one who does the testing. It's not that long since I found out I've had it all my life because the school I went to they weren't up to teaching me because they'd just put me up the back of the class and forget about me and they only taught the ones who knew how to do it. People like me, we were up the back of the

classroom. I wasn't the only one that had trouble with reading and writing – they just put you up the back of the class and didn't care less.

Engaged man 34 yrs (Disability)
North West

Some adults carry lasting scars from feeling that they were different from others at school their class. Others, like the woman below, described being totally overwhelmed and frustrated at not being able to understand or take in what the teacher was trying to teach.

When I left school I had a complete breakdown. Just before that I was so overwhelmed in one class because I couldn't take in the information the teacher was talking about so I stood up and tore all of the pages out of my book because I felt completely overwhelmed because I didn't understand it.

Disengaged woman 46 yrs (Disability)
South

One indigenous woman stated that a barrier for her was the lasting effects of being bullied at school, because she was indigenous, and how this experience still affects her now.

Back then, being from (a well-known Indigenous family in Tasmania) there were places I got abuse because of having the same last name. There were some kids at school every day that bullied me and it went on every day, all day. It had a big effect on me – even now it affects me. Some places I won't go.

Disengaged woman 42 yrs
(Indigenous) South

Some adults reported having poor core skills because of a disability or

sensory deficit that wasn't picked up during their childhood by family members or teachers.

The quote below is a tragic reminder that some learning difficulties are entirely avoidable, and when they go undetected over a period of time, they can have very long term consequences for the individuals involved.

... why the teachers never even gelled to the fact that I was sitting holding my hand up and saying 'please miss can I read what's on the blackboard?'

I'd go up and read a few words with my face within 6 inches of the black board then come back and write the words down then stand up and go back to the blackboard. The kids would start laughing... So after a while, I got up to the back of the class and then I became the naughtiest kid in the class and consequently I never learnt. If the teachers had picked that up earlier, maybe I would have had a better education, a better life.

Engaged woman 68 yrs South

2.2.4 Early Learning Experiences of people with CALD backgrounds

Many adults from CALD backgrounds were subjected to traumatic events which occurred in their country of origin or on their journey to Australia, as refugees. Some CALD adults lived in squalid conditions in refugee camps for many years before arriving in Australia. One man reported that he was in a refugee camp for the past 18 years and was now learning English in Australia.

Other CALD adults described receiving a good education in their country of origin, but felt traumatised as a result of global events, such as the invasion of Iraq and the subsequent war. These CALD adults described grieving for lost relatives and their former life.

The following engaged man's account of his early education in New Zealand illustrates the kind of educational experiences that some adults bring with them to literacy programs as adult learners in Tasmania.

Maori is my first language and then you go to an English school... and you're looked at like you're a dummy. You only know how to speak Maori... and you're told you're not allowed to speak Maori in school time or you'll be punished.

Engaged man 49 yrs (CALD)
South West

I only went to Grade 7 down the Huon because we had a hard life. We went to about 60 schools because we had to go where the fruit was to pick. We had to pick when we was five years old right up to when I was 12, 13yrs, then had to work fulltime for my dad.

Engaged woman 57 yrs South

There were a smaller number of people who stated that they liked school and were sad to leave. One woman reported being forced to leave by the school principal because she was at 'leaving age'.

I went up to Grade 9 in school at Warrane High School. I was at the leaving age but I wanted to do Grade 10 but they wouldn't let me because if I'd done Grade 10 I would've been 17 when I left. I had to leave at the age of 16 so I never got the opportunity to do Grade 10. At the time the headmaster said 'no you're at the leaving age'.

Disengaged woman 48 yrs South

2.2.5 Working at a Young Age

Both engaged and disengaged adults described wanting to, or having to, leave school at a young age.

Others described being forced to leave school, because they were expected to help their parents with their work:

I didn't enjoy school. I didn't even finish Year 9. I just wanted to get out into the workforce. Mum wrote a letter to say that I needed to leave school to stay home and care for her. She told me that if I had a job to go to I could leave.

Disengaged woman 50 yrs North East

2.3 Attitudes to Further Education

Another barrier that emerged during the interviews with disengaged adults was attitudes towards education. This included attitudes about the amount of education that people considered appropriate or adequate.

In Tasmania, the public secondary education system is structured in such a way that students attend high school until Year 10, then if they want to complete Year 11 and 12, they are required to move to a Secondary College.

It was interesting that when some adults were asked if they had completed their secondary education, they would reply that they had, when they had only completed Year 10. For some, completing Year 10 was, in their mind, equivalent to or the same thing as completing their secondary education.

Further, some disengaged adults regarded their secondary education as 'enough learning' and that if they wanted to take up further learning, either now or in the future, then it was probably 'too late'.

Well I finished grade 10 and did Year 11 so that is enough education. No, it's probably too late any way.

Disengaged woman 25 yrs South

Others referred to education as something you got out of as quickly as possible, the main priority was to get a job and earn money.

It's alright if you know what your goals are and you strive towards them and know what you need. I left school at Grade 10 and I had no idea what I wanted to do, I just wanted to find a job. I didn't care what it was, you know, I just wanted to get some pay.

Disengaged woman 42 yrs North

Other attitudes that emerged during interviews were those related to holding low aspirations or goals. Many disengaged adults expressed the view that getting a job was the goal, not aspiring to higher education or a career.

You need to teach the kids and set standards for them. I mean you go to school and you learn and if you get a job good and well, and if that's

packing shelves in the supermarket, who cares? You don't have to be a scientist.

Disengaged woman 45 yrs South

One indigenous woman stated that people don't engage in literacy programs because many people believe that having low core skills is their 'lot in life'.

There are various reasons why people don't become involved. Literacy is a major problem and people feel like 'it's their lot'.

Disengaged woman 27 yrs
(Indigenous) South

Looking back, some adults in the disengaged group expressed regrets about leaving school early.

Many also expressed the view that their time for learning 'was over' or 'had passed'. These adults did not view education as a lifelong activity, which they could return to at different stages of their lives.

Adults currently engaged in literacy programs were more likely to talk about taking up learning opportunities throughout their lives. The differences between the engaged and disengaged adults suggest that the formation of attitudes towards learning influenced later decisions to engage or not engage in learning as an adult.

When disengaged adults were asked if they would take up literacy programs many stated that they wanted to 'get by' on their own and 'didn't want help' from anyone. The following comments were made by disengaged adults right across the State.

I've got some friends that can't read or write properly and stuff but... they got by over the years and they handle it.

Disengaged woman 33 yrs South

Some disengaged adults, who were currently working, stated that they were concerned that if they took up learning opportunities that interested them, they might not be able to get back into the workforce.

Others spoke about previously having time out of the workforce and recounted how hard it was for them to enter the workforce and re-learn everything again.

2.4 Adult Education & Training Pathways

Many adults described difficulties with moving from one learning environment to another, because of a lack of appropriate preparation or support. This issue was raised by many adults, especially those from CALD backgrounds.

For example, people with low literacy reported that they struggled to transfer from high school into vocational courses (Polytechnic) or from training, or literacy programs, into higher education.

It was suggested by many that there needed to be much more support for transitioning into new learning environments and greater linkages between educational organisations, to catch those who became disillusioned and ultimately dropped out or remained in a previous program.

This woman's experience of trying to enrol at University and eventually giving up because it was all too hard was repeated by a number of adults.

I enrolled in a course at Uni several years ago but I was working full time at the time. I couldn't even navigate the website and it put me off because I thought I was stupid but when I rang them and told them I was having problems they said that everyone has problems with it.

Disengaged woman 46 yrs South

People with low core skills frequently talked about others they knew, either immediate family or friends, whose literacy levels and confidence was so low that they would need help to transition from home into a community setting, before they could engage in any form of learning program.

Engaged and disengaged adults across Tasmania spoke about helping others with lower levels of literacy than themselves; in effect they were providing a similar kind of support that a literacy tutor might provide, but at a much lower level.

2.4.1 Literacy Programs Not Meeting Needs

A number of adults from CALD backgrounds stated that their needs were not being met by the current literacy programs on offer. This was primarily due to the different levels of need of each adult learner and that they were all being placed together in the one class. Many expressed genuine frustration with the current situation.

I trained in communications then came here three years ago and since then my brain is now dead. I come to literacy for company and to learn to spell better in English, but I have to be quiet and sit through other things which I learned as a six year old. I would like more specialised help.
Engaged man 29 yrs (CALD) North

I would like to work half time on computers and half time learning in the classroom. I need more help with specific issues but teachers are trying to cater for all of the class and we are all so different.

Engaged man 49 yrs (CALD) North

In addition to people from CALD backgrounds being placed into classes with others with very different levels of literacy, others spoke about the diversity of people's needs within their own cultural communities. One man from a CALD background described the variation of needs within his own community.

One man spoke about the importance of oral communication skills for people from CALD backgrounds. He explained that for many people who had been learning English and/ or literacy for some time, that their greatest need was conversational English.

Because we are within the same community and because it is not necessary we speak all the time in [first language]... very few speak English but they understand English ... and also those who can speak English hesitate, they might not speak because it could be incorrect so they hesitate and they cannot overcome this problem.

Engaged man 29 yrs (CALD) North

Other CALD communities confirmed that they too speak in their first language at home, so getting practice to speak English was limited to the times when they were attending formal classes.

My children learn English at school but we only speak in our language at home so it causes some problems for me.

Engaged man 45 yrs (CALD) North

2.4.2 Courses for Low-Skilled Work

Adults from CALD backgrounds and other disengaged adults commented on the types of training courses that they were being encouraged to take up, usually by Centrelink or employment agency staff. Many believed they already possessed the skills that these courses were seeking to provide them with e.g. dish washing, basic kitchen hand tasks.

I have done courses, lots of them. Why do I need to do a course on washing dishes when I have been doing this my whole life?

Engaged women 36 yrs (CALD) North

I mean... to be a kitchen hand now you've got to be qualified. Most women have been doing dishes their whole lives. People aren't going to go and do courses to be a kitchen hand because you do it at home every day every week.

Disengaged woman 45 yrs South

2.4.3 Rural/Online Courses

Other disengaged adults from rural/remote areas described their experiences of enrolling in further education courses. Some, such as this woman from St. Helens didn't get the outcome that she had hoped for.

I did a computer course online at home... from Launceston. They would send the work to me but I just couldn't get my head around it. They weren't helpful at all – they wanted me to change the font but what the hell's the font? I know now because my husband helped me.

I wouldn't do it again [computer courses]. I was really put off by the experience with the online study.

My partner ended up teaching me more and I only do Facebook. I'm waiting for my partner to do up a resume for me because I wouldn't have a clue.

Disengaged woman 50 yrs (Rural/Remote) North East

2.4.4 Lack of Awareness of Available Courses

Other disengaged adults reported that they were unaware of what courses existed or were available to them.

I'm on a sole parent pension. Centrelink have never suggested I do anything – I've never heard nothing about any courses or anything. I'm just managing as I go at the moment.

Disengaged Woman 29 yrs South

2.4.5 Cost of Learning

The costs associated with learning such as travel expenses, access to computers and course fees, were all frequently described as barriers to further learning, especially by disengaged adults.

I think they need to offer more courses at different levels but cost is an issue because it costs \$2.50 now one way on the bus.

Disengaged man 21 yrs South

We rely on the internet quite a lot but a lot of families can't afford computers or even dictionaries.

Disengaged woman 46 yrs South

To get to some of these courses you've got to drive to get there say from New Norfolk to town and you'd have to spend a lot on petrol to do that. I mean it's a lot of money and a lot of people think like that. It's the same if you haven't got anyone to look after your children, they need to have more childcare at these places.

Disengaged woman 45 yrs South

I would like to learn and practise my English while doing activities with others like art or craft. I know there are adult education courses but these are too expensive for us.

Engaged women 55 yrs (CALD) North

With increasing costs for household amenities such as water, electricity, rates, etc. many people felt that this alone would prevent them from being able to take up adult learning opportunities. Most of the adults interviewed for this research were on very low incomes and many stated that they can't afford a simple hobby course let alone anything else.

I would find it hard to go back to learning now because I have a child to support on my own and the costs of raising him are increasing it's also the costs of living and it's the time which is limited.

Disengaged woman 46 yrs South

2.5 Employment

For many people it was not possible to talk about taking up core skills programs without also talking about how this would affect their opportunities for current or future employment.

Both the engaged and disengaged groups identified a host of perceived barriers related to having low literacy and employment, including the changing nature of work, meeting requirements for welfare payments, a lack of jobs, and few opportunities to gain work experience.

2.5.1 Limited jobs for people with low core skills

Some adults spoke about the shifting nature of work in Australian society and how they had personally been affected by these changes. Many agreed that in the past there were a greater number of jobs for people with a range of abilities. People with low core skills felt that these changes had caused many people to 'fall between the cracks'.

Back then there were jobs for people like us and it was considered that that's fine, you'll never be a this or that but that's ok. I was accepted and that was it. But of course now you've got to have a degree just to sell those tickets at the railway station. It's something we've developed and

done and we've pushed everyone, pushed, just pushed people who haven't got the skills under rocks all over the place.

Engaged man 57 yrs South

My mum only went to Year 9, then she went straight into a job. Years ago you could do that, but now they want all this reading and writing and there's nothing, no jobs you can go into.

Engaged man 18 yrs South

There was a view by many disengaged adults that taking up courses to improve literacy skills would be a waste of time, because at the end of it all, they would still be excluded from gaining employment;

I can't actually pinpoint what would motivate me to learn something. You can have all the qualifications under the sun and there's bugger all out there in terms of work.

Disengaged Woman 37 yrs South

If they want us off unemployment they've just got to give people a go, don't discriminate against us, there needs to be a job at the end of it, but I don't believe the jobs are out there. If I did a course and got my certificate, I'll have done it all for nothing.

Disengaged woman 48 yrs South

Other adults, particularly in the disengaged group, felt that training and courses would not help them find work. Many believed that there were not enough jobs and those that did get the jobs did so through someone they knew, not what they knew.

I did a certificate of attainment in Business Studies when I was looking for work three years ago and it

didn't make any difference with me getting work. I just happened to know someone in the right spot that was hiring. I applied for that many jobs and didn't get interviews – just letters saying the position had been filled.

Disengaged woman 42 yrs North

One man stated that he had always managed to get employment throughout his life, despite not being able to read or write. He stated that it was getting harder to cover up his low core skills and that his age was now becoming another barrier to employment.

I've never had a drama getting work, surprisingly enough, despite not being able to read and write. I've got licences for everything you can think of – cranes, rigging, you name it, forklifts and other things, four wheel drives... And every one of them has been a story to get there.

... But I'm finding now my only problem is the age... I applied to Mitre 10 because I'm really into tools and things but they wanted me to go into the office as well as work the floor. I know I can do it, but I can't just walk in there and do it. So I actually filled out the resume and went in there and said, 'I need to start on the floor to figure out what and where everything is'. And then I could move to the office area. So that's how I do it. I do it in stages.

I don't have the confidence to say, 'Oh I can't do that straight away' because the first thing they'll do is say, 'Each day you've got to write a report, or fill in a form, or whatever', and I'll go 'Huh?' and run away and hide.

Engaged man 57 yrs South West

2.5.2 On the Job Training

For people who were currently employed, many looked to their employers to provide them with opportunities to improve their core skills. Some found workplace attitudes impeded them from further learning opportunities. One woman felt that she was consistently offered fewer opportunities for training despite performing the same work as her peers because she had no qualifications.

I think people who lack qualifications are often put down by people who have higher qualifications. So there's that whole thing of wanting to keep people down. That work culture. There's a lot of jealousy.

In my job I've always put my hand up for training and always been denied it. My colleagues often go on training interstate, etc. because they say 'I've already got this qualification or that, so I should go'. I get to go to the free trainings that come along. They want to keep me in my place. Being treated like this just makes me tired.

Disengaged Woman 44 yrs North

People from CALD backgrounds also expressed frustration at having no pathway into a job, or even a voluntary work placement, which could help them consolidate the learning they are doing at English/literacy programs.

We need to work but we also need to deepen our English. So if we were in a job, that would also improve our English.

Disengaged man 57 yrs (CALD) South

A number of women described how their husbands or partners are able to build on their learning and improve their English, because they can practise at work.

My husband's English is very good, and every day he learns more because he is working.

Engaged woman 32 yrs (CALD)
South West

2.6 Government Agencies and Services

Accessing and meeting the requirements of Government and community programs and services was particularly challenging for many people.

During the course of this research, a social worker at Centrelink confirmed that it was common for people, particularly men with low core skills, to become enraged and walk out during interviews when staff members were attempting to ascertain their literacy needs. The social worker explained that underneath the anger and rage was often a deep embarrassment about their low literacy and not wanting to talk about it.

The following quote describes one woman's feelings about going to a Centrelink office and the need for services to be mindful of how they engage with the public, and especially those with low core skills.

I think again it comes back to that first point of contact. It has to be in a really comfortable place. Not in an office that is open. The way Centrelink operates now, they have this person with this thing in their ear and then they say 'Hello, I'm such

n such' and 'Who are you?' and 'What are you here for?' And then, in front of everybody they say 'Oh yes, you're here to see such n such' and then they give your information over a microphone. And then receiving information back, they then regurgitate it all back to you and everybody in the line can hear, and they listen to everything.

It's really intimidating. At this very first stage, the balance of power is really uneven. The minute you walk through those doors you're made to feel guilty for being there, and less than everybody else who's standing behind those desks. And immediately it puts ones hackles up.

I mean, I walk in there to say how much I'm earning each fortnight, so I'm coming in as someone who has got some self-worth. I stand in the line and I'm getting furious because I'm listening to these people three up from me – what their reference number is, and why they're here, and I'm thinking, I don't want people to know why I am here. Get stuffed. I don't want to talk to them. I've got my hackles up by then. I think that all of this makes it doubly hard for anyone to front up and tell anyone they've got an issue, or that they need help. So right there, again, the minute they walk in the door and there's someone up there who is really powerful and they say 'How can we help you?' they are going to start putting their barriers up.

Disengaged woman 46 yrs South

Others commented on the assumptions made by services in relation to a person's core skills and how this places people in very difficult situations, often only adding further to

their embarrassment and feelings of inadequacy.

I've seen people in Centrelink who are told to update their information on the computers because they assume that people have computers at home or know how to use them. You wouldn't think they would make those assumptions, would you?

Disengaged woman 21 yrs South

One woman stated that at her Centrelink office a staff member showed her how to use the computer and that this had made things a lot easier for her.

I have an appointment fortnightly with Centrelink to say what jobs I've applied for. But everything's changed. I remember being in there one time and the lady came up to me and said 'You can do that on the computer', and I thought, 'How do I do that?' She showed me and now I just go in there fortnightly and it's ten times easier, because you don't have to line up in a queue. Just log your private numbers in.

Engaged woman 36 yrs South

Another issue that was raised as a barrier was that the amount of assistance a person can receive varies according to the type of benefit or pension they are on, and whether they have a partner or not. This can mean that people with similar literacy needs have unequal access to literacy support.

I was going through the employment agency but when I went from being on the pension, and then when my son turned 16 and I went off the pension and I went onto carer's payment, and since then I've been

married and because I'm a carer I'm not allowed to use the job agencies. It's a bit hard. I just scan the papers and look for cleaning jobs.

Disengaged woman 43 yrs South

2.6.2 Limitations on hours available to attend literacy programs

One of the most frequently mentioned barriers for both engaged and disengaged adults was the limitations placed on the number of hours available to attend literacy programs by Centrelink.

You can only do 800 hours [of literacy] and they are in blocks of 200 hours. So there's four blocks. So I'm into my third block. You get something like an extra \$21 [per fortnight] for coming.

Engaged man 57 yrs South

I attend English classes on two half-days a week. The rest of the time I stay at home. It's not enough. I forget from one week to the next.

Disengaged man 38 yrs (CALD) South

People need to come [to literacy classes] four days a week, not two days.

Woman 35 years (CALD) North

Many other adults, especially from CALD backgrounds, were frustrated with not being able to continue on with English classes over a longer period in order to consolidate their learning.

Centrelink allows people to attend a total of four blocks of 200-hour literacy programs. Each block usually extends over a six-month period, and then people must wait a further six months

before they can take up any further literacy programs. This means that many people are continually starting and stopping their learning.

Many engaged adults interviewed for this research were unable to build on their learning because they could not remember what they had done after each six-month break. Any earlier gains were effectively being lost, or at least significantly eroded.

One young man had been on this 'on again, off again' cycle for the past three years and described the experience like this.

Our brains have stopped. All we do is start courses. Then we have to have a break for six months; then we start again. My brain is dead, then comes awake, then becomes dead again. Before I came here my brain was alive all the time. Not anymore.

Engaged man 35 yrs (CALD) North

An interpreter for an Ethiopian man described a catch-22 situation where Centrelink would no longer allow the man to attend English classes, but the job agency he had been referred to would not allow him to attend work-related courses or help him find work because he did not have enough English.

He's not going to school. He's just sitting at home because the people from [the job agency] say he cannot go to any more English classes, and that he was to go and find a job and do courses. But he hasn't done any courses because they say you haven't improved your English, and he feels really bad about it.

Disengaged man 38 yrs (CALD) South

In addition to the overall lack of hours available to learn English and literacy, other adults from the CALD community felt that there simply were not enough times offered during the week for people to attend classes.

It's good for the English conversation group here. My daughter, she goes to school and she needs to go to school Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, so I can't attend English conversation group any more. So it would be good to be offered in the afternoon or after dinner.

Engaged woman 30 yrs (CALD) North

In my community the peoples wants to learn because sometimes they have a meeting in the community and what they say is that in Polytechnic there is not sufficient classes for the non-English speaking peoples. Because there is Wednesdays, Thursdays, Fridays and come 9 to 2 pm and only at this time is the classes at the Polytechnic, which is not enough for them, because after Polytechnic they have to go home and in that time they cannot possibly speak English. And this is one of the problems for my community. They want to speak more and more English.

Engaged man 29 yrs (CALD) North

Lack of follow-up with students after the completion of a program was also mentioned as creating a barrier to continuation of learning, even when a student was motivated.

My daughter was doing a literacy course... and she really enjoyed it. Then there was the Christmas break. She wants to do it but they never called her back. She called them, she kept asking, 'When will it be starting

again?' and they'd say 'Soon', but they never call back.

Disengaged woman 50 yrs (Rural/
Remote) North East

2.6.3 Reading and Writing Hotline

Some adults mentioned being disappointed with advertisements on television in recent months promoting the federally-funded 'Reading and Writing Hotline'. A number of people said they had contacted the number and were generally disappointed with the information that had been provided to them.

My cousin had trouble with literacy and he suffered from a lot of embarrassment and stigma. So I talked to him and he rang the number on a TV ad. It wasn't that simple. They just gave him numbers to ring.

Disengaged Woman 28 yrs
(Indigenous) South

I have thought about, you know, the ads on TV where they say literacy and numeracy, get in touch, etc. Get in touch with this number, if you're having problems. And initially I thought, 'What a brilliant little ad' because the people on the side can say 'Well, I'm going to give them a ring'.

But when I rang it had nothing to do with learning how to read and write at all. It's got to do with being immigrants and what have you, and actually being able to fill out forms. It's not for people who have actually been left behind and are wanting to learn to read and write. It's for someone coming into the country to learn how to fill out forms.

Engaged Man 46 yrs South West

2.7 CALD - Language at Home

Some in the CALD community stated that they spoke English at home with their children, whereas others stated that they only spoke in their first language, either because they were teaching young children their first language before they went to school or because speaking in their first language at home was the norm for their community. Those in the latter groups generally struggled to build on their communication skills in English, simply through a lack of practice.

We speak English at home because our children are learning English at school.

Engaged woman 36 yrs (CALD) North

We don't speak English at home because I don't want the little girl to not speak Spanish, so I come here to practise English.

Engaged woman 50 yrs (CALD)
South West

Perhaps the greatest barrier and area of need for people from CALD communities was the amount of practice they were able to get outside of class time.

I find it difficult to practise English away from classes because Australians such as my neighbours and friends tend to speak too quickly for me. So I just give up.

Engaged woman 45 yrs (CALD) North

The first time when you say it's difficult people say, 'Oh, you're okay'. But sometimes I do not understand and it's embarrassing... I have Spanish friends since coming but I have no Australian friend. For a long time it's

like just a meeting or greeting with Australians and only for a short time.

Engaged woman 32 yrs (CALD)
South West

I ended up partially completing the course. A bit of a waste of a year.

Disengaged woman 28 yrs
(Indigenous) South

2.8 Parenting responsibilities

For many disengaged adults, especially women, they saw their primary role as looking after their children and/or grandchildren.

I've got five children. I had my first one at 19. I think I've been a mother for that long... and now I've got four grandchildren and I devote my time to them. See, I've been a mother and supporting my kids and now they want us to go out and get a job, but how can we do that when people are losing jobs and they're sacking so many people.

I like to be home when my son comes home from school because I've done that with my other four older children. You see I have to be home by 3pm so when they walk in the door I'm there and I've done it all my life. I can't see why I can't be a mum.

Disengaged woman 48 yrs South

One indigenous woman who had children in her teens and who attempted to continue on with her learning shared this experience.

TAFE gave me the skills I was going to need. I trained in childcare. I passed the theory but when it came to the practical I realised with two small children on my own I didn't have it in me to look after someone else's kids. My own kids would've ended up in childcare.

For some women, their greatest barrier was being a sole parent and having little or no support.

My family's here but I don't speak to my mum. My sister has her own family and my dad works. I've only got my grandmother, though she's in her 80s. So it's a bit hard.

When I had my son I stayed at home. I've looked after him all my life. His father hasn't been in the picture or anything like that so I don't have people to fall back on to look after [my son], you know, to go for an interview or stuff like that. So a lot of things have to revolve around my son, around schooling. He's my number one priority. I think other people my age have families that they can fall back on, that they get some support to go out and get work.

Engaged Woman 36 yrs (Sole Parent)
South

One sole parent in the disengaged group talked about her experience of taking up a course whilst at the same time caring for children. This mother of four children, one with a severe disability, found the whole experience utterly exhausting.

When I first started going back to school it was from 8.45 am to 1.30pm every day and I found that so tiring because I had to get the kids all organised and take them to school early. Get on the town bus, sit in a classroom and, I mean, I wanted the job. I did my training. I got my certificate. I did all that. But I found it

hard and trying to be a mum at the same time.

Disengaged woman 43 yrs South

A small number of parents talked about enrolling in further education programs but found the whole experience too daunting, especially without any family support.

I enrolled in a Bachelor of Arts for 12 months but it was just too hard to work fulltime doing shift work. I had a baby and I got sick. I had no family of any kind. I had no support and I was isolated.

Disengaged woman 46 yrs South

Many young people in the disengaged group described leaving school at a young age, often working for a short time in factories, takeaways or supermarkets and then having children. Most of these young people thought that they would return to similar types of work once their children had started school.

These young people generally had few aspirations to return to study in order to gain a higher qualification or to try and move into any other type of employment.

The following quotes describe the circumstances of most of the young people who participated in this research who are living in low socio-economic areas.

I went to high school and left in the middle of Grade 9. I used to work in takeaway shops and then my mum passed away and I ended up at home with six kids. It was 1998. I was sixteen when I had my first child. My

kid's ages are 13, 11, nearly 10, nearly 6 and nearly 2.

Disengaged woman 29 yrs South

I enjoyed school. I never had any problems with it but after school I went on to have children. I've got two. I was 20 when I had my first one. I've done factory work too.

Disengaged woman 27 yrs South

This young man describes how his priorities have shifted since he discovered that he and his girlfriend are expecting a child.

I'm just applying for what comes up in the paper. I think that it's like, if you study, you don't have the income and with a baby on the way your priority is to get more money, not do courses. I wouldn't want to take up more training just in case a job comes up.

Disengaged man 21 yrs (Rural/
Remote) South West

Other parents in the disengaged group simply felt that they did not have the time or the energy to take up any form of learning with the current family responsibilities they were juggling. The priorities for them were just to get through each day and look after their children.

It's the time when you can actually do it. A lot of people say you can do it [learning] at home in your own time. Well, hello, I just don't get any time to myself. Unless you're talking about three or four o'clock in the morning. Then you might get about one or two hours to yourself.

Disengaged woman 37 yrs South

Many young women in the disengaged group felt that child care costs were a major barrier to participating in literacy programs.

I would like to do a computer course and stuff like that, but with the money I'm on now I can't afford to put the kids into childcare. I mean, I know I'd get the childcare rebate and all that, but in most places you still have to pay a bit. So I just thought, I'll wait till he's older.

Disengaged woman 25 yrs South

Right now I just don't have the time to do courses and things like that. It's a matter of juggling things around the kids. I mean, I could go during the day but childcare just costs too much and I don't have anyone to look after her during the day. And it would have to be during school hours and other people have Nans and things like that. You see both my parents have passed away, so I've only got a Pop. There's no support.

Disengaged woman 29 yrs South

2.9 Carers

Another group who also felt that they lacked support were those who were currently in caring roles. This included some who had spent most of their adult life caring for others.

I think it's not fair on us. I feel we are being discriminated against because we haven't got a piece of paper to show anything for it. We, my sister and I looked after our mother for 21 years. And it took a toll on us. It took a toll on my health and now I've got to work on my health to get it back up again.

Disengaged woman 48 yrs South

2.10 Threat to relationships

A number of women commented on disengaging from learning because of a perceived or real threat to their relationship.

At about thirty-five I enrolled in the University of Tasmania and I used to go up in the bus every day and sit in the class with all the kids. And I did that for six months. And of all the things at the time it was my husband who said, 'Its either school or me'. And silly me, I threw school in and a little way down the track I got a brain and threw him in. But it was too late. I think you'll find it can be the other way around too. When the men go off, when the women say, 'What are the young girls like?' It's a jealousy thing. It's insecurity really.

Disengaged woman 55 yrs South

When I worked in the disability area and was doing my certificate, my boyfriend at the time was a farmer from an old farming family. And he turned around and said to me, 'So you think you're pretty clever'. And that was very much about, 'How dare you get above your station. How dare you do well'. Because of that fear it's a threat to a relationship.

Disengaged woman 46 yrs South

2.11 Health

Health concerns were the main priority for some people in the disengaged group. They described being on public waiting lists for various health conditions that made it impossible to work or follow their earlier ambitions.

Other people in the disengaged group talked about having injuries or disabilities that affected their ability to

secure certain types of employment or continue on with further education and training. Many of these people had worked for many years in positions requiring heavy physical labour, such as cooks, cleaners, farm hands, factory workers, etc. These injuries either motivated people to take up further learning because they could no longer continue on in a particular line of work, or had the effect of being de-motivating, because people could not see the point in trying to study or work when they were carrying a debilitating injury.

I've got some vertebrae in my back that are wrecked and some arthritis, osteoporosis and I need a left knee to be replaced.

I'm not looking for work any more because with the injuries I've got, and what I'm trained for, you've got to be on your feet too many hours and I can't do it. Doing bar work or waitressing, you have to be on your feet.

There's nothing that would motivate me to go back and learn because the jobs that I'm interested in, the jobs that I enjoy, are the jobs I can't do. There are a lot of jobs out there, but they're on your feet. They demand good health.

Disengaged woman 47 yrs (Disability)
South

I'm on a disability pension because I have slipped discs in my back. I do want to get out and do a lot of things, but as I said, everything just pushes me to the limit.

Disengaged woman 42 yrs (Disability)
South

Others physical problems included those who described having memory problems that impacted on their capacity to learn or work in various occupations.

It is difficult to determine the numbers of people with mental illnesses who are accessing literacy classes, as mental illness has its own significant levels of stigma and people are often unwilling to disclose their problems.

One disengaged woman shared her experience of recovering from mental illness and returning to a rural remote area without any support to help her re-engage with learning.

I went to Yr 12 and to teachers college and left because I was unwell. When I came out of hospital I went back to my home in a country town. I was isolated. The only educational resource was the TAFE centre and they only offered business courses which I wasn't interested in. There was limited support through Centrelink. In fact, there wasn't any support through Centrelink. There was never any contact with social workers, there were no liaison officers. There was no expectation either of higher education in my immediate family, or in my community.

Disengaged woman 45 yrs North

Another disengaged woman described receiving treatment for depression after a series of life events that led to her giving up looking for work or wanting to learn.

I've been on antidepressants since I was 18. It's a lot of things. My husband died two years after I was married. Lost a nephew when he was seven years because things weren't picked

up on at the Royal, so he died. Just a series of events that just keep going. I was raped twice and sexually abused twice – not that long ago.

Disengaged woman 47 yrs (Disability)
South

People with intellectual disabilities described significant barriers to learning and finding work.

This man's opportunities for further learning had been considerably reduced due to the long-term impact of a motor vehicle accident.

When I left school I went looking for a job. I worked for the Department of Roads and I worked with a private company for two to three years until I had a car accident.

Ever since it's been hard for me. I do gym sessions for rehab, I work at the Botanical Gardens twice a week for \$75 on the computer doing plant names.

I've never done any courses since the car accident. It's too difficult for me. I was alright when I was at school, before the accident, but not any more. I'd be no good at it now.

Disengaged man 40 yrs (Disability)
South

2.12 Learning Environment

The importance of the environment in which programs are delivered was mentioned by several interviewees. A number of people thought that libraries were the wrong environment for learning literacy. Although many libraries have changed from being quiet and often austere places to hubs of activity and noise, the perception of some adults was that they remained places of quiet in

which they did not feel comfortable. Others feared being recognised in such a public venue.

People with low literacy don't go to libraries because it's all quiet. You can't talk. It's all quiet and you can't stand it. People with low literacy stay away from libraries because they're too quiet. This has got to be taken out of it.

Engaged man 60 yrs South

People need to feel comfortable too, because people need to feel like they belong in an environment. If they go down to the library they have to put up with the scrutiny of the other people at the library. You know, passing negative comments, or they've seen someone going into the literacy room. People can find that really difficult to take.

Disengaged woman 46 yrs South

Other adults described being unable to cope in certain closed in environments, such as a classroom situation.

I want to skip going to a classroom if I can. Because I don't like being in classrooms, I get claustrophobic. I need to be out in the open. Classrooms are too closed in.

Disengaged woman 42 yrs (Disability)
South

2.13 Criminal Record

The issue of young people committing petty crimes and having a criminal record came up in several interviews across the state. Many people felt that this was a significant barrier preventing people being able to move on with their lives. Many adults felt that people were paying for things

that they had done in their youth for the rest of their lives and that this was a major disincentive for engaging with any programs and services. There were several examples where this perception was reinforced by real-life experiences of discrimination.

There's not enough help for people who may have committed a crime when they were younger. They need a program where they wipe away the past. Yes, like a second chance.

... because it's like a black mark against them forever. Everyone I know in [suburb] has had charges against them when they were young. So they don't see the point in coming to places like this because they think they will never get a job anyway.

Engaged Woman 45 yrs North

My son, the 22 year old, he's got a criminal record and he went and did a course at the Polytechnic. And they knew about his criminal record and they made him do work placements and then they told him he'd have a job. And then, when he went to start, the criminal history record came up and they wouldn't give him the apprenticeship, and that devastated him. He was devastated because he'd been all up front with them. He was all honest about it. He really wanted to be a painter.

Disengaged woman 43 yrs South

3 MOTIVATING AND ENABLING FACTORS

In order to explore the issue of motivation, engaged adults were asked about their experiences of learning literacy as an adult, what motivated them to take up learning core skills and what could help others with low literacy to become involved.

For many engaged adults their motivation for attending literacy programs was simply their desire to learn.

Many people interviewed commented on the benefits of taking part in literacy programs and the changes in their lives that have taken place as a result of their participation.

Three months ago I got the first job I've ever had, and I'm 58 years old. I asked for the job because I've been in some literacy training and I've the confidence now.

Engaged woman 57 yrs South

They've improved my literacy skills. They've been upgraded to about 80%. If I'd have done that years ago – what they taught me in here – I wouldn't have had any problems at all.

Engaged Man 60 yrs South

It's the little things that you learn in the classes that give me another little edge.

Engaged man 35 yrs North

Many of the engaged group described feeling a lot more confident having joined a literacy program. Some attributed their recent transition into employment to their increased confidence which they gained through learning core skills.

I asked for the job because I've been in some training and I've the confidence now. I get confidence when I come here but I get more confidence at work. I'm so glad I go to work now – it's really good.

Engaged woman 57 yrs South

People from CALD backgrounds also described gaining confidence through attending conversational English classes. These classes also provided many adults with an opportunity to meet others and make friends.

After I joined this group, I have more confidence. I have more confidence to speak, more bravery. I think the group has helped me a lot. I just want to speak English fluently. I want to but it is so hard for me. I can enjoy the situation here (conversation group at the LINC), it's not boring. We can meet people and make friends.

Engaged woman 37 yrs (CALD) North

For some adults attending core skills programs had literally been a life-changing experience. This is one woman's account of how her life has changed since taking up core skills learning.

I have a disability and I'm bipolar and have OCD (obsessive-compulsive disorder)... I was motivated to come to literacy classes because of my children... It's taken me a while to feel comfortable here, it's like a home. In high school I failed everything but now I'm passing Level 3 and 4.

Then I heard about this course and I think it's the best thing I've ever done because I actually made friends here

and I feel confident now. I can learn – it teaches me how to communicate with people.

Before I couldn't trust anyone but I am learning that I am safe and I can trust.

Engaged woman 45 yrs North West

3.1 Time and Opportunity to Learn

Having the time and opportunity to learn was a critical factor underlying involvement in core skills learning for many adults.

As many core skills programs available for adults are only offered on weekdays during school hours, the people who can attend are generally those who are unemployed, between jobs, have been made redundant, have taken early retirement, have children at school, are caring for family members or are recovering from ill health or injury.

The other circumstance that led adults engaging in core skills programs was following a personal or family crisis, such as the death of a loved one. This man from a CALD background describes making a decision to take up learning during a period of mourning following the death of his partner.

I came here through my social worker. She said 'What are you going to do?' [following the death of your partner] and I said I really want to get back to reading and writing. I say I don't know how to read or how to write... I'd love to... I'm missing out on books. I'm missing out on everything because my mind at the moment just gets depressed.

Engaged man 49 yrs (CALD)
South West

Currently there appear to be few opportunities for adults to learn core skills after hours or on weekends. Expanding the options available to adults who currently are unable to attend would allow a greater number of adults with different circumstances to engage in learning.

For other engaged adults, their motivation for attending core skills programs was a desire to keep learning and connect with others while they waited for a job. The primary motivation underlying their engagement was to find employment, as this woman describes.

If I find a job I would not come any more but while I'm waiting to find a job I will keep coming because I am learning every day.

Engaged woman 50 yrs (CALD) South

3.2 Feeling Useful

Some engaged adults described being motivated to attend literacy programs because they wanted to feel useful, as well as less isolated and bored.

These adults tended to be those that had left work because of injury, had taken a redundancy, were approaching retirement age or were unable to secure alternative employment due to their lack of core skills.

When you leave that workforce it makes you a bit isolated, you feel like you're out of everything. With me doing this it makes me feel happier. I feel like I'm useful for something.

Engaged man 60 yrs South

3.3 Personal Attributes

Many of the people engaged in literacy programs described themselves as being positive people who were generally 'willing to have a go'. Overall, those engaged in literacy programs came across as more enthusiastic and confident than those who were currently disengaged from learning.

I'm the type of person who is willing to give anything a go.

I think there are jobs out there. I think it's just a matter of them helping me and me helping me.

Engaged woman 36 yrs South

The engaged adults also tended to show greater levels of interest in learning per se. These adult learners would often make comments about being naturally curious, and many stated that they wanted to be able to do what others can do.

I like gardening but you see there are words in there... the Latin names and you struggle and you wish you could say that. That's my thing – as soon as I see something, I want to know, I want to know what that is. I'm nosy.

Engaged man 49 yrs (CALD)
South West

3.4 Public Engagement

Some engaged adults expressed a desire to become involved in literacy programs in order to learn how to write letters about social or political issues or write books that might assist others.

I'm older now and I feel that now I want to speak out about it. That's why I've been writing letters to the Government about it. They wrote back and said thanks for the feedback and we'll push forward with it. I even went to the Council and I said 'I want you to monitor the literacy and numeracy skills in the Derwent Valley of these young ones – get someone out there to assess these young ones to see if every one of them kids is up to scratch'.

Engaged man 45 yrs South

Those in the disengaged group did not express any similar motivations; in fact, one woman said that improving core skills in order to engage in public discourse was a waste of time.

The last time I read a paper would've been when I was looking for a house and that would be going back three years ago. I'm not interested in what's going on because everyone [politicians] says the same thing. It's just how they laugh it off. They tell you all the lies under the sun but you never see any of it. They never do what they say they are going to do. It would be a waste of ink, paper and a stamp to learn to write letters [to politicians].

Disengaged woman 37 yrs South

3.5 Employment

Some adults in the engaged group stated that they were undertaking core skills programs in order to build the skills that they would need to find work.

I've gone back to doing it [literacy] later on in life and now that I'm doing it and it's really helping. This is much better because I want to go into a job

where I can pick up a piece of paper – that I've got to work with – and read that piece of paper. I know what's got to be done because I know no workplace is going to take people who don't how to read and write.

Engaged man 34 yrs (Disability)
North West

Many adults from CALD backgrounds stated that their primary motivation for attending literacy programs was to find employment.

I come here because I want to get a job and get confident talking with people.

Engaged woman 35 yrs (CALD) North

We are very much interested to learn English and develop because later, my community, almost all people want to do the job and without English there is no possibility.

Engaged man 29 yrs (CALD) North

Disengaged adults stated that they were not interested in attending literacy programs because they wanted to focus on finding work, or more hours of work, to increase their income.

3.6 Centrelink

The following young man spoke about doing courses so that Centrelink would be less likely to 'worry about him'.

I've got to get Cert 2 to get them [Centrelink] off me. If you get Cert 2 or 3 they don't worry about you so much.

Engaged man 18 yrs South

Few engaged adults stated that they were primarily attending to satisfy Centrelink requirements or to get Centrelink 'off their back'.

Like I jumped at it... because it was something I'd always wanted to try but had never been able to jump into it.

Engaged man 57 yrs South

Centrelink doesn't make me come here. I choose to come.

Engaged woman 57 yrs South

I was looking for a job and I wanted to keep learning and improving.

The providers sent me here, the employment agency, because I have an arthritis problem. I love to be part of this society. I want to learn and would come to classes anyway even if Centrelink didn't make me come.

Engaged woman 50 yrs (CALD)
South West

3.7 Financial Incentives

Some thought that incentives such as being guaranteed a job after training or a financial incentive to help with the costs of travel for each course would be a positive way to motivate people to learn.

I think if you want to encourage people to take up learning... you could offer them an incentive... more money incentive... money for travelling... and more money for each course they do... offer them that little bit of extra money to go... until they build some confidence.

Disengaged woman 47 yrs (Disability)
South

3.8 Program Delivery

3.8.1 Good Teachers Essential

Another very important motivating factor for engaged adults was having a teacher or tutor who was encouraging, especially when they felt like giving up.

Teachers or tutors who were attuned to their students' needs, who carefully monitored their progress and who showed a genuine interest in them as people, were critical to successfully engaging adult learners. Teachers' reputations are especially important in small communities, where they can be a motivating factor for people to engage in literacy programs.

I'm very embarrassed about letting anyone know I have troubles... but I'm starting to get over that now... and every time I start thinking I won't keep doing the literacy... my tutor just encourages me to keep going with it.

Engaged woman 29 yrs North

Many engaged adults spoke about the importance of having teachers who have an understanding of what it is like to have low literacy and who are sensitive to the needs of adult learners.

The following incident was recounted by one engaged man to emphasise just how damaging insensitive teachers/tutors can be on the confidence of a group of adult learners.

We had a teacher here at one stage, we called him the teacher from hell, and I don't think he is with them any more but his classic thing all the time was 'I don't believe you don't know

this, I don't believe you haven't done this and of course this is why we are here'... because we didn't learn that and it was so degrading to have him say that all the time, so everyone just goes further into their shell because he thinks I should know that... and I don't.

Engaged man 55 yrs South West

3.8.2 Different Needs/ Different Levels

Other engaged adults spoke about the appropriateness of subjects or types of material being covered in some literacy classes.

So they're trying to teach you like you would have done at school, but most of us never got to this level and in all fairness the class is fairly mixed, though it's like some people do know their maths but don't have the English, but I do think they aim fairly high because I do think that they think that's how it should be. Do you know what I mean? You should be at that level.

Engaged man 57 yrs South West

Some engaged adults expressed a view that it was difficult for literacy classes to cater to everyone's needs and interests.

Others emphasised that adults came to literacy programs with such a wide variation of abilities that it was sometimes difficult for them to learn or get the most out of the experience.

Some of the literacy we do here is around what I want to do and some of it isn't, like at the moment we are doing science – how things work and don't work – so it really depends, we're doing a mixture of everything.

We got all ages in there, different levels of education, so everything is pitched in the middle.

Engaged woman 36 yrs South

They are trying very hard to cover everyone. You've got so many people in there with very different needs.

Engaged man 52 yrs South West

3.8.3 One-on-One is Best

As the LINC program was only just being set up at the time this research was being conducted, many adult learners were unfamiliar with the one-on-one tutoring that was going to be offered at libraries throughout Tasmania. Many engaged adults thought that the LINC program would be a good alternative for people who had specific learning needs or for those who felt that the group programs were not meeting their needs.

The following quote comes from a man who was attending the LINC program and receiving individual tutoring. This man felt that the most motivating factor for him and others was the one-on-one approach.

I think... the best thing to do is the one-on-one basis.

It would make these people like myself more confident to come in because they know they are going to get the help.

Because I want to learn, I really want to learn.

Engaged man 49 yrs (CALD)
South West

3.9 Cultural Literacy

CALD adults were asked to identify the types of skills they were hoping to gain by attending literacy programs. People from CALD backgrounds need to learn about living in a new country and speaking a new language, and so are often highly motivated to learn. The following quotes sum up the high levels of motivation expressed by many of the adults from CALD backgrounds currently engaged in literacy programs across Tasmania.

Put it this way – I didn't have a driver's licence, boat licence, forklift licence and the tutors are helping me out with the computer, so I'm getting all these things.

Engaged Man 49 yrs (CALD)
South West

I just get the job after I join in this group. I learned how to make resume application letter here for a job. I tried to send a few of my applications to a few places and I get one – a job in a restaurant and I'm still working there but still casual. I am in the kitchen; I cook the rice and cut up food and clean the dishes using the machine.

Engaged woman 32 yrs (CALD)
South West

The basic things that you need in day-to-day life I can do but it's hard to do extra things.

At the moment I'm doing the Diploma of Nursing at the Polytechnic and also here, the language literacy and numeracy course, and sometimes if I don't understand something and if I can't ask the Polytechnic teachers and again if there are problems, I now have the option to come here and ask my tutor and she explain, which is very useful.

The LINC is a backup of support for me.

Engaged man 29 yrs (CALD) North

3.10 Providing a Pathway

Engaged adults stated that there needed to be greater support in transitioning from literacy programs into other kinds of programs or into employment.

Many people described situations where they had participated in a literacy program, but where at the end of the program there was nothing else to move on to, and very little planning or support to help guide them on to the next stage of their development.

Many adults wanted a clear pathway from literacy programs into other courses, into work experience placements, into 'on the job' training or into appropriate employment.

The following quote provides a good example of how two educational providers worked together to meet the needs of a young man who was at risk of becoming disengaged during this transitional phase.

I went to TAFE but they put a great big book in front of me and it scared me, so I left the Polytechnic, gave the books to the U-turn program, so I do the work down there. I'm much more comfortable at U-turn because I know the people there.

At U-turn they're good because they don't just get you to do the course and then chuck you out; they keep trying to help, yeah. They try to make it better for you and they even try and help you get a job. There's not a lot of people that will help like they do.

U-turn helped me get my learners. I couldn't do it on the computer, so I did it with people asking me questions and stuff.

Engaged man 18 yrs South

Many adults in the disengaged group stated that they didn't see much point in taking up core skills programs unless there was some clear benefit to them. Some adults reported that it would be difficult for them to feel excited or motivated about learning when the only job they were likely to get at the end of a course was one that they could potentially walk into without doing any courses.

I'd do more training only if there was something I wanted to do. If there's a job that I wanted to do, I would be willing to do more training, but I'd want to know that there's a job at the end of it. Why train in a classroom for nothing.

Disengaged woman 43 yrs South

This woman describes the situation for one young man she knew who had engaged with learning but the end of program did not lead to ongoing engagement in either learning or employment.

There's no central meeting place; there needs to be a progression. It's no good sending people off to do courses and finishing them, having nowhere else to go. They need to be transitioned immediately into something else and something meaningful, but don't put them into something simply because there's a vacancy.

Disengaged woman 45 yrs South

Some CALD adults reported becoming disengaged from learning

because there was a lack of an appropriate pathway from learning English into work, or on to further education.

A number of the CALD community members described their experiences of trying to cope with higher education. Some received support and others received no help at all.

Need programs that have more than Certificate 3 or 4. They need a Certificate 5 that can prepare people for going from TAFE to University.

Engaged women 45 yrs (CALD) North

3.11 Knowing your Goals

Engaged adults tended to know exactly what areas of core skills learning they wanted to focus on, and some stated that they had always known in the back of their minds that one day, when the opportunity arose, they would take up further learning.

Many people talked about wanting to obtain a driver's licence. This is often a difficult and costly process for people on low incomes, and more so for people with low literacy, especially if they repeatedly fail tests. People with low core skills felt that having a licence was important for gaining employment and for building confidence.

Literacy programs could be developed to provide greater assistance to people to gain their licence. Driver mentor programs could be extended to include literacy support.

I've only had my licence, this August, for three years. At that time I had Steps Employment and they paid for

me to have lessons. It made a real difference because I could then get a job. I got a job out of it.

Disengaged woman 43 yrs South

Getting a driver's licence was also very important to many people in the CALD community, who often lacked the use of a vehicle for learning and often had no one with a full licence to accompany them when trying to reach the number of driving hours required.

It is very important for people to get help to get their driver's licence if they are going to get a job.

Perhaps LINC volunteers could do the three-hour course for helping with driving hours. This could be beneficial in that it develops the relationship, increase time to practise relevant English and introduce new words that have a direct impact on people's lives like me.

Engaged man 29 yrs (CALD) North

Disengaged adults were generally unclear about their learning needs and were more likely to report that they had no intention of returning to learn as an adult.

The adults in the disengaged group were asked what would motivate them to take up core skills learning. A powerful motivator for some would be having a clear goal in mind about what it was that they wanted to achieve.

Others thought that they would only take up learning if there was something they specifically wanted to know.

It's alright if you know what your goals are and you strive towards them and know what you need. I had no idea what I wanted to do. I just wanted to find a job – I didn't care what it was.

Disengaged woman 42 yrs North

I don't know really – probably if I'm having trouble with something, maybe having trouble with some sort of task, then I might decide to do something, but I'm not really sure.

It's been on my mind [to do some further study] but I'm nearly 33 so maybe in a couple of years I might go back and do something if I decide I want to change my job or something. I'll see what happens.

Disengaged woman 33 yrs South

3.12 Reducing Embarrassment and Stigma

In relation to reducing the embarrassment and stigma of low literacy, one suggestion was to stop using the term 'literacy' in the title or description of programs offered to adults.

Interestingly, adults from low socio-economic and rural /remote areas were much more likely to argue for the total removal of the word 'literacy', whereas adults from higher socio-economic and urban areas held precisely the opposite view.

Adults from a higher socio-economic status and living in urban areas tended to say that it was all right to use the word 'literacy' because its use was an honest description of what the program was about.

Well I've got to be honest, I don't see a problem with it [the word 'literacy'] because that's what they run with,

because that's what it is, and I accept that. I don't mind the term [literacy], I can relate to it. I don't mind it at all because I don't read anything into it.

Engaged man 57 yrs South

In contrast, the lower the socio-economic status and the more rural and remote, the less likely it was that people thought that the term 'literacy' should be used.

These adults argued that removing the word 'literacy' was very important given that so many people associated lack of literacy with being 'dumb'. They argued that removing the term 'literacy' would reduce the stigma and embarrassment of adult learning and would encourage more adults to attend.

The 'numeracy and literacy' has got to be worded different. Call it 'life skills' to take the embarrassment bit out of it. When people are doing it, you've got to make them feel happy. You've got to get them having that happy feeling in them and then that will mean they're enjoying it.

Engaged man 60 yrs South

To improve workplace literacy, it's best to go through the union movement because each workplace has union delegates and it would be possible to identify who needed help in the different workplaces so people could be linked in. But you can't call it 'literacy and numeracy', though; it's got such a bad stigma about it. It would have to be called 'improve your communication' or something like that.

Disengaged man 44 yrs (CALD) South

I think it should be called 'adult learning'. If you call it 'literacy'

it does bring up that thing; the opposite of literacy is illiterate and that's a negative thing. It's too close a word to the negative. Or 'adult advancement', because something like that acknowledges that you have the one thing that kids don't have and that's experience, and life experience counts for so much.

Disengaged woman 55 South

Many adults in both the engaged and disengaged groups thought that the best way to teach core skills was by embedding the core skills learning in activities that interested people. This might include classes in cooking, woodwork, mechanics, or how to improve the management of your sporting club.

I would like to learn and practise my English while doing activities with others like art or craft. I know there are adult education courses, but these are too expensive for us.

Woman 55 yrs (CALD) North

Others argued that the best way to engage adults was to hold activities in venues where adults enjoyed going, for example men's sheds or sporting clubs, and where there was an emphasis on having fun, meeting people and learning new things.

3.13 Learning Environments

A number of adults stated that they would like to see literacy tutors able to visit people in their own homes, at least initially, especially those who were very embarrassed and lacked confidence. Some commented that the idea of going to a literacy class in a public venue was just too big a step for them to take.

I wouldn't mind doing a course, but I'd have to do it in my own home because I feel better about myself in my own home, but being out in a classroom and stuff, I don't think I could do it. I wouldn't go to the library because I'm more comfortable doing it in my own home than out anywhere else. I'd be happy to have a volunteer come to my home and do it.

Disengaged woman 48 yrs South

For adults from a CALD background home tutoring was seen as an ideal way to encourage other CALD adults who were very shy about getting the assistance they need.

I would like to have the tutors come to our home very very much, that is, 100%. I wanted that so much because my wife has also the same problem. She also has little qualifications and she's so hesitant to speak in front of people. She couldn't really speak but she understand, and if we get the peoples to go to the home and help, that is really important.

Engaged man 29 yrs (CALD) North

Home tutoring was again raised as a useful way to reach people from rural and remote areas who would not come to a program at a public venue.

People may want to do it at home but they are not going to come in because that means they'd be exposed. Going into people's homes would be better.

Disengaged man 58 yrs (Rural/
Remote) North

Apart from home tutoring adults, both groups felt that core skills programs could be held at a number of community venues that people

already attended and enjoyed going to.

Sports clubs, men's sheds, places like that is where they could reach people. People enjoy that. It's a good place to start and they all get on so well together, making things in wood, selling, donating.

Disengaged man 58 yrs (Rural/Remote) North

But I wouldn't want to go and sit in a classroom because I'm too claustrophobic for that. I just feel too closed in with other people. I like to be out in open spaces.

Disengaged woman 48 yrs South

I think people would come to the (Aboriginal) Women's Centre to do a course in literacy but I would go somewhere else if I wanted to do it, but basically I'm shy.

Disengaged woman 27 yrs (Indigenous) South

They need to put the services into the places where they know the people go, like the men's sheds because people like to go there, also the sporting clubs, places like that.

A lot of men feel a lot more comfortable leaning over the front of a car and talking about what's bothering them rather than going to a Community Centre which is often dominated by a lot of women.

Disengaged woman 46 yrs South

Many people, especially in rural areas, thought that existing facilities could be used to conduct a variety of literacy programs so people would not have to go to libraries to get help with literacy.

Some suggested that there ought to be adult literacy programs in schools

Parents of children who are starting in kindergarten could start doing a program to prepare them for helping their children at home as they go through primary school. Most parents are usually motivated and eager to help their kids learn when they first start school.

Disengaged women 25 yrs North

3.13.1 Consistency/Ongoing Learning

The need for ongoing and consistent learning was reiterated by many adult learners if they were to retain learning core skills.

Learning literacy is like learning a foreign language. A lot of people I know, they forget. They need to know that that they have regular ongoing sessions; otherwise they find it too hard. They need a consistent learning environment.

Disengaged woman 42 yrs South East

We need to get people into environments that are conducive to them learning, and people will tell you themselves. They know where they learn best.

Disengaged woman 46 yrs South

3.14 Supporting Children

Another motivating factor for many people with low core skills was the desire to reach a level of core skills that would allow them to support their children's learning.

I came to this course because my spelling, reading and writing had

been okay at school but I thought I'd just like to update, upgrade it. I was concerned that when my son went to school, when he asks me how to spell something... and I have to say... ah... ah... I'm not sure – this was one of the main reasons.

Engaged woman 36 yrs South

Many parents in the disengaged group had the same concerns as those parents currently participating in learning core skills.

I'm okay now to help my boy, but not when they go to high school. It is better that I get help so I can help them.

Disengaged woman 27 yrs
(Indigenous) South

My youngest son, he's having tutoring. He's picked up a little bit with the aides at school but I can't help him. You see, I find it hard to do it.

Disengaged woman 48 yrs South

Despite low core skills some parents were able to find ways to help their own children with their low literacy.

Two of our sons had trouble reading and rather than sitting them down with a normal book because 'I'm not a bloody kid', we got things like car or football books, things that they were interested in. We started off with sporting results. They were doing all the work- they just didn't realise it and it kept their interest and it worked.

Disengaged woman 55 yrs South

Many disengaged parents said they simply had no time for getting involved in learning. Many stated that their number one priority in their lives was their children.

My priority is looking after the kids. I have my step-kids full time, so it's 100% of my time.

Disengaged woman 25 yrs South

Other young disengaged parents indicated that they were keen to do something in the future, even if they weren't entirely clear on what that would be.

When my youngest child's at school I'm going to look at it. I'm going to try and do something – I don't know what.

Disengaged woman 25 yrs South

Many engaged and disengaged adults expressed a desire for their children to receive a better education than themselves.

Neither of my kids have got literacy problems because we taught them and sent them to a place to make sure they did get it.

Engaged man 60 yrs South

Only a small number of people expressed a view that they would be happy for their children to receive the same or less education than themselves.

I'm not going to push my kids to go on to college or anything like that. No, I'd like them to finish high school but if they want to get a job after that, by all means go right ahead. Go and get yourselves a job. I'm not going to push them into the college because I know how much I hated it.

Disengaged woman 37 yrs South

Many parents expressed their frustration at not being able to help their children with school work.

I can help my son with his school work so far – he's only eight – but I'm not sure if I will be able to in the future.

Engaged woman 50 yrs (CALD) South

Other parents spoke about relying on teachers and the education system to help their children with learning.

My eight-year-old, he's had a lot of issues outside of school and it's affecting his schooling a bit – but that was the last two years – but now he's with a different teacher and she's really good with him. He's picked up heaps, just this year, because she was taking into account that he had issues outside of school... She knows he's different than a lot of kids emotionally.

Disengaged woman 26 yrs South

I've never had any trouble with helping my sons with school work because they learn most of it at school. My son had problems with maths but they set up a special learning course for him at school, so he's come a long way since that, which is really good.

Disengaged woman 45 yrs South

Some parents suggested that the schools could play a much greater role in helping parents who want to assist their children to learn.

I think there are good programs for little kids at the libraries that the community health nurses promote to parents at home with young children. This works well but it all stops when kids go to school. There could be a program that continues on in conjunction with the school.

Only once has a teacher sat down with all the parents at the beginning of the school year and explained

what the children will be doing that year at school. I found this really helpful because I can't read any of the information they send home for parents.

Some other parents walked out of the session and acted as if the teacher was wasting their time telling us parents what the homework would be.

Disengaged woman 25yrs North

Home work clubs were seen as a way to support parents with low core skills to help their children learn and do homework tasks. This was especially important for sole parents who felt they had no one else at home to help their children learn.

Maybe an after-hours school program where... homework and students go together... and it's not seen as you're dumb for going to that. (It) would need to be seen as a fun thing. They could have afternoon tea. Parents could bring something to share and they could have community homework sessions... Not all parents could do it. It could be done in a way that recognises that working parents are working much longer hours – that they are not seeing their kids when they get home. The kids are going home to empty houses.

Disengaged woman 46 yrs South

3.15 Marketing Core Skills to Adults

Adults in the disengaged group were asked about the best ways to reach people with low core skills and to promote literacy programs in Tasmania. Most people thought that TV advertising would be the best way to reach people with low literacy.

I think literacy needs more advertising through TV and flyer to inform and attract people. They should also say they are free too.

Disengaged woman 27 yrs
(Indigenous) South

I don't think people know where to go to get help [with literacy]... it's not advertised enough out there.

Disengaged woman 45 yrs South

Some felt that the best way to reach others is through Facebook. I think if you want to connect with people and let them know about what's on offer, like literacy classes and things, Facebook is the best way to connect up with people.

Disengaged woman 31 yrs
(Indigenous) South

There's an ad on TV at the moment about littering. I think it's a stupid ad but my kids know it word for word, so something like that for literacy might work.

I mean the ads they have on TV about learning to read and write, they [my kids] sing that constantly.

Disengaged woman 43 yrs South

Some disengaged people felt that they wouldn't notice advertising even if it was there because they are just not interested in learning core skills.

One day I might think about going back [to learning] but I don't think that there is anything they could do [advertising] that would catch my eye for me to go back.

Disengaged woman 33 yrs South

3.15.1 Reading Writing Hotline

Many adults in the disengaged group commented that they had seen the Federal Government's advertising campaign for the Reading Writing Hotline and offered these comments.

I seen that ad... for people who can't read or write to ring this number. I don't think it's a good way to reach people. I mean, if they want help they'll ring it, but they're probably too frightened to ring it.

Disengaged woman 25 yrs South

I have thought of ringing up that number... just for maths, but no, I haven't yet. I haven't yet because I think money – how much would it cost?

Disengaged woman 43 yrs South

I have seen the ads on TV about the Reading Writing Hotline but I didn't think to ring it because my problem is spelling and they didn't say it was for people who had problems with spelling. So I just didn't think that they would've been able to help me.

Disengaged man 35 yrs South

3.15.2 Changing Community Attitudes

Some people thought that any advertising or promotional activities needed to target the general community in order to reduce the stigma attached to low literacy.

Maybe it is advertising but not in that all hearts and flowery stuff because this is a reality, you know. We all have challenges. We all need help with something in our lives. If this is what you need help with, this is what

*we can do to help you with that...
and there's nothing shameful about
wanting to better yourself, you know...
And it's not just about changing the
thoughts of those people that need to
do it. It's about changing everyone
else's thoughts too, so that they say
'yay that is good that they are going
to that. It's not because they're
stupid, it's because they're pretty
clever because they actually want to
do something'. It's more positive.*

Disengaged woman 46 yrs South

*Any advertising needs to look at
it from the other side – you're not
'dumb' for doing learning. No,
you've got to turn it around. Actually,
I'm quite smart because I'm doing
something about it.*

Disengaged woman 55 yrs South

4 SUPPORTING ONGOING LEARNING

4.1 Support to engage

Several people suggested that being able to attend with a friend would really help motivate them to attend core skills learning. Others spoke about the importance of having support from family and friends as a way of remaining motivated and committed to keep going.

What about a friends program. If you could get people to go with a friend and that way they'd work as a buddy system. I don't mean get a buddy when you start, but enter the program with a buddy. I mean, like if you dropped out of school, chances are your best friend did too. So you're probably both in the same boat, so why not grab that friend and say, 'Okay, let's do this together'. That way they're not sitting in a classroom by themselves with people looking at them because they have a friend there with them.

Disengaged woman 55 yrs South

You see, I like being with friends. Say, if I could go to it with a friend, you know, if I knew a friend was going to it – then I might go, but I'd still rather be at home doing it.

Disengaged woman 48 yrs South

Many people felt that support was critical to help any person with low literacy, and that it needs to be provided at appropriate times.

When you're not given that extra support when you need it, then most people just give up. I think people need support when they first leave college but some people haven't been given that support.

Disengaged woman 20 yrs South

A number of people emphasised the need for literacy programs to be free of charge and that programs ought to be offered to various groups in the community.

I think the LINC's need to help people in the lower socio-economic groups ... and I think the main barriers are childcare and the stigma attached to it... it should be a free service and offered to groups.

Disengaged woman 28 yrs
(Indigenous) South

Another issue around support was the importance of long-term relationships with services and organisations that can provide ongoing support for people with low core skills.

It's more about knowing that these things are going to be stable. You know, a lot of times people start something and that person gets moved along to something else and someone else is put in, and things change. And people build those relationships and they need to be there, to stick it out with those people.

The big thing to push is that there is that support, yes, you're not going to come and do this and be left on your own to do it.

Disengaged woman 46 South

If I needed help in the future I'd go back to Access Employment – they're a disability organisation that helps people look for jobs – and they helped me get a job at Coles, they did. They come in sometimes and check that you're happy, and if you're not happy you can let them know, you see. If I said I wasn't happy

in my job they would help me look for another job.

Disengaged man 25 yrs (Disability)
South

4.2 Assessment and Case Management

Some interviewees thought that people ought to receive much more assistance when they first access benefits through Centrelink. This would include careful assessments of their needs at the outset, as well as ongoing support through having a case manager.

I'm not sure how Centrelink operate but I think there should be a literacy assessment the minute someone starts tapping into benefits.

I think [literacy] has to be tied in with the whole process of finding a job – the whole process of getting less dependent on government handouts. It has to be incorporated into the whole package.

You go in, you get assessed and they work out what your strengths are and what your weaknesses are. Then they compile a profile of the person and they work out what those people's needs are, and then people are guided, I guess, and equally what the person wants, what their aim is. I think people need early intervention, case management, someone they can have face to face contact with at least once a week.

Someone they know they can sit down with for up to two hours a week.

Disengaged woman 46 yrs South

Some people, such as those with some disabilities or mental health issues, face significant challenges and would benefit from extra, individualised support that might be provided through a case manager.

A lot of people with disabilities, they might be in supported employment but it's not case management. But it is sort of, but it's limited. Maybe they need a case management coordinator, someone who can check that the case managers are actively helping the people to find education and training.

... and I know it's not working for a lot of people. A lot of agencies are doing a really good job but it seems to come down to a few individuals who walk the extra mile with people, and the rest stick by the book. It's time-limited. Maybe they have too much on their plate. I don't know.

Disengaged man 42 yrs (Disability)
South

There are lessons that could be learnt from literacy programs in the past. This woman spoke about a program that used to operate in a supported workplace for disabled people.

They use to have literacy tutors that would go out to supported workplaces but they don't have that anymore... When the literacy people came into the workplace because the workplace was being funded, they would allow people to have an hour off in the course of their day and do literacy, and people were doing really well. But the minute the funding stopped for that, people lost that.

... People were awarded certificates and there was a big deal made out of it. It was seen as a fun thing to do and it was something that elevated your status in the workplace, and at Level Two certificate, there was an incentive there, and there was pride in that workplace.

Disengaged woman 46 yrs (Disability)
South

4.3 Recognising Strengths

There were a number of people with low core skills who stated that despite their low literacy they had developed other skills and abilities which they tended to put their energies into. The recognition of these skills and abilities should be a key element of any literacy program.

Some adults wanted to talk about what they were 'good at' rather than the areas they were not as strong. Many mentioned activities at which they excelled, despite having low core skills. Many people wanted to be recognised for the strengths they possessed, and many felt that these other skills were often overlooked by others and the community at large.

One young woman gave the following example of how people with low core skills can feel valued for the skills they do possess, while at the same time receiving help to improve their core skills.

Even though I'm not very good at reading and stuff, I have developed skills in other areas. I've become quite good at crafts, you know, knitting and crochet, etc. In fact, there is an older lady who comes to the Community Centre, she knows how to read the pattern books and I know how to knit and crochet, so once a week we get

together. I show her how to crochet and she teaches me how to read patterns out of the book.

Disengaged woman 25yrs North

Weakness in core skills does not equate to a lack of intelligence, and their lack of core skills can often go unnoticed.

I had a woman in there the other day say to me, 'But you look like you would know that. I just thought that you would know that'. It's like I've built up my other skills so much that they just can't fathom that I wouldn't know something.

Engaged man 57 yrs South

I'm more of a practical person than a theory person. If I have to do things on paper it goes in one ear and out the other, but if I'm doing it with my hands I can remember it straight away... I can have a decent conversation about stuff, and they all think, 'You're not stupid, you're not dumb'. Okay, maybe you've got... some weak areas in some spots, but in other places you're pretty good at communicating and stuff.

Disengaged woman 33 yrs South

Many adults described working in a variety of skilled occupations where they were able to develop other skills that compensated for their lack of core skills. One such ability many people with low core skills referred to was their ability to memorise tasks they had been shown in the workplace. People also reported being good with their hands.

I can memorise programs, it's a piece of cake. I can learn safety things in the workplace, no problem, and you know what you've got to do.

I think that's a part of it. Never being able to spell it or read it, but I can do it. I don't know how to read and write. I just do it. I just learn it.

Engaged man 49 yrs (CALD)
South West

The effective of literacy programs could be enhanced by taking time to design them with prospective clients, rather than for them, as this insightful woman points out.

I think there's too much of agencies telling people where they'll learn best, rather than asking people where they learn best. I mean, they have acknowledged it in schools for some time. You know, they bring in Harry Potter or Lord of the Rings, or even racing car books, as opposed to Jack and Jill went up the hill. They are going to learn faster if it's something that they're interested in, rather than something they have no interest in.

Disengaged woman 46 yrs South

4.4 Workplace Training

Some interviewees thought that workplaces needed to provide more support and opportunities for employees to access literacy programs, without any stigma attached. They felt that learning opportunities ought to be available to everyone, no matter what level of the organisation they are working in.

I guess in my present situation in my job I am disappointed that I haven't been given more opportunities to learn. What I have learned, I've done on my own, through trial and error really. I think in some places I've worked they would rather see you fail than succeed.

Disengaged woman 46 yrs South

I think businesses should be encouraged to take on some responsibility to take on someone who can do things in a practical manner, then to help with their literacy.

Disengaged woman 46 yrs South

I think it ought to be standard that employers put their staff through some sort of literacy courses, but you don't call it that. So, for example, if your staff have done Level 2 or 3, everyone is required to do the next level up, and the tutor will know who's OK and who needs extra support... It will only work, though, if people know their employment is secure.

There are ways to do it without a lot of cost, and staff can do it as a buddy system because there are usually two staff on together, and when it gets quiet of the evening the staff can work on their literacy work.

Disengaged woman 42 yrs (Disability)
South East

Lack of literacy can be tacitly acknowledged amongst co-workers in some workplaces, and informal behaviours adopted to compensate for an individual's low literacy, as illustrated in the following quote. If the unspoken support that is evident amongst co-workers in this example were matched by open management support for improving core skills, great gains could be made in such a workplace.

What tends to happen, though, is workers will cover for other workers. So Johnny comes in and he can't read the communications book, so he makes some excuse – 'I didn't get time' – they get verbal information from other people and they build up relationships with others, then others

might realise that Johnny never reads the book and they cue into that and they give a verbal account of what's in the book. They cover each other.

Disengaged woman 46 yrs (Disability)
South

4.5 Engaging with the individual

As mentioned in Section 4.3, some individuals, such as those living with physical and mental disabilities, mental illnesses and CALD backgrounds, experience more significant challenges than others in developing core skills. The attitude of people providing services to such people can have a large impact on their outcomes.

They look at the person's disability and limitations, and then look at the limited opportunities in the immediate vicinity of that person... there's no creativity.

... Mostly people with disabilities... are limited by other people's attitudes and values.

Disengaged woman 46 yrs (Disability)
South

When service providers focus on what they perceive a certain person cannot do, they can lose sight of what they can do, or may be capable of doing if given appropriate support and encouragement.

4.5.1 Disability Services

Some interviewees with disabilities felt they had received a great deal of support and assistance through various disability services that were able to cater to their specific needs.

Many felt that knowing about this specialised and long term support increased their confidence to engage in finding employment and participate in other activities.

Cosmos were really fantastic. They helped me to become more confident. They helped me to speak up for myself. If someone was giving me a hard time or harassing me... They helped me to do, like, interviews and that. They would sit down with you and they helped me with literacy and numeracy and all that stuff. They were great.

Disengaged man 25 yrs (Disability)
South

4.5.2 Mental illness

The expression of the mental health issues experienced by a person may fluctuate over time, and demand tolerance and patience from service providers. The following examples of people with depression show how this may affect their attendance, as well as a heightened sensitivity to the stigma of poor literacy.

I have depression tablet. My daughter says don't push yourself to do too much. Sometimes I cry.

If I can't come or I have a problem, because it's not easy, I let them know. Once I started to cry and said I have to go.

Engaged woman 50 yrs (Mental illness, CALD)

I've had my ups and a lot of downs. And when you get to the stage where you... There's been a few times in my life when I've been upset, and the worst part has been being called dumb in my life. Yeah, and that's been the hardest part.

I had to get a bit of a psychologist here for a while because I couldn't handle [town] for a while. ...I felt like a failure, I feel like a failure. I said the only good thing in my life is the reading and writing. The LINC's been helping me with my reading and writing.

Engaged man 49 yrs (CALD)
South West

4.5.3 People from CALD backgrounds

To effectively engage adults from CALD communities it is important to first understand the different needs, motivations and context of each CALD community. One important distinction is that between new entrants and established post-war migrants. Low literacy can be an issue in both categories, but the social context is very different.

The following two quotes describe two very different cultural groups in Tasmania in relation to learning core skills. The first relates to the well-established Italian community where low literacy is present but not addressed openly.

There are particular needs in the older as well as the second generation and now third generations. Generally with the older age groups their literacy levels, even in their own language, as well as in English, their adopted language, is actually fairly low.

... So generally people in the community who are illiterate would pretend that they haven't got their glasses, 'Oh, I've left my glasses in the car', or at home, or many other excuses. And if you magnify that with the migrant experience where

a lot of people were down and out, a lot escaped from Italy and Europe because of difficult circumstances, you can understand why they don't want to do anything about it.

Disengaged man 45 yrs South

In contrast, the newly arrived Nepalese are taking an active role in organising their own literacy programs.

In my community people organise an English class for our community as volunteer work, especially the young people, because they are able to write or understand few English words. But all the older people like my father, my uncle, who are over 45 years, at this age they have more difficulties because some of them are unable to write their name and we, the Nepalese people, organised one literacy and numeracy class, and we people teach them. We organised a Saturday class and... this class help because they can ask in their own language if they don't understand, if they have a problem, because we can explain more in our own language.

People who learn English become the middle man because they go to the LINC and learn and then they become the teacher for the others. They would not come to the LINC because it is too hard for them. For this group it's just too difficult.

The Saturday school is still going and it is all voluntary because we the people are interested to help. Because if my grandfather, mother, uncle, can buy something from the supermarket and they speak a few words to the Australian people we feel happy. Thinking like that, we do this.

Engaged man 29 yrs (CALD) North

For many people from a CALD background, the use of bilingual teachers and tutors was considered to be very important, especially when they first arrive in Australia. Many from the CALD communities felt that there were not enough bilingual teachers or workers to help them.

It's crucial that there are more bilingual people because you congregate with those who are like minded and from the same culture. That was my experience. You were more comfortable with people from your background.

... It's crucial to have a network of people, perhaps voluntary people, who can inspire others in a particular ethnic community. You don't need many, just a few, to inspire others to do something.

Disengaged man 45 yrs South

CONCLUSION

A number of clear general themes about people with low core skills emerged from the interviews. Key research findings are presented below for the four focus areas of this research:

- a) The impact of living with low core skills.
- b) The barriers that prevent or discourage adults from taking up core skills programs.
- c) The factors that have motivated or enabled adults to become engaged in core skills programs or that would motivate disengaged adults to undertake a core skills program.
- d) Identifying what would support adult's ongoing engagement and learning within core skills programs.

Whilst the experiences of the people consulted during this research varied considerably, the major themes highlighted in this report were drawn from the experiences and views of the majority of adults in each group. Overall, the key findings are consistent with other Australian and international research in the area of low literacy and adult learning.

The overall responses suggest that although there are many motivated people engaged in literacy programs, there is a need for the development of a range of program models to attract those who are currently disengaged. The research indicates that providing a variety of innovative delivery options will go a long way towards keeping engaged people motivated and attracting disengaged people into literacy programs.

This was a qualitative piece of research, the scope of which was not broad enough to draw definitive conclusions on the specific needs of the six target groups studied: rural and remote areas; CALD backgrounds; low socio-economic background; Aboriginal background; those living with disabilities; and with mental health issues. However, where applicable, some specific findings and recommendations relating to a target group have been put forward.

KEY FINDINGS

1 Living with Low Core Skills

Low core skills significantly impacted on the everyday lives of the majority of adults participating in this research. The impact varied according to the level and the number of core skill areas adults had difficulties with.

Many adults reported being unable to perform everyday tasks such as filling in forms, reading letters or bank statements, writing or sending emails, knowing how much change to give others and paying the correct amount of money on public transport.

Others with very low core skills relied heavily on others to assist them with most basic everyday living tasks. These individuals were often socially isolated and disconnected from the mainstream community.

Low literacy also impacted on each person's capacity to fully participate in the workforce, and to contribute to and fully participate in family and community life.

Many adults stated that having low core skills increased their level of stress, anxiety, depression and frustration, while also lowering their self-confidence.

Overall, adults with low core skills were deeply embarrassed about their low core skills and many went to considerable lengths to hide it from others. Many men, in particular, described 'bluffing their way through life' or feeling like 'con men' due to their ongoing efforts to conceal their low literacy from others.

While the majority of adults stated that they had resigned themselves to never getting a job or only being able to find work in low skilled areas, others

spoke about being unable to take up employment opportunities that arose or leaving a job for fear of others finding out about their low core skills.

Another major disadvantage of low literacy was being less able to help their children or grandchildren with their learning. Many adults stated that they were missing out on opportunities to bond with their child by not being able to read a book together, or assist them with finding out information that others take for granted.

For many of the interviewees, living with low core skills was one of multiple factors that compounded to create a life of considerable disadvantage and exclusion. These issues included poverty, drug and alcohol problems, poor mental and physical health, and mental and physical disabilities.

However, many demonstrated considerable intelligence, resourcefulness and resilience in negotiating the world around them despite their lack of core skills. Many had developed strong skills in other areas such as trades, crafts and spoken communication, and many told how they assisted others with less skill than themselves.

2 Barriers to Learning

Barriers to engaging in core skills learning were identified by both engaged and disengaged adults. Major themes included:

Community stigma/embarrassment

- The stigma associated with having low literacy or as 'being seen as dumb' was a major barrier to engaging in learning as an adult.

- Fear of being humiliated, ridiculed, or of being treated with less respect by family, friends and the wider community if others were to find out about their low core skills. Some disengaged people thought that talking about their low skills was too risky as it could affect their future employment prospects if others were to find out.
- Seeking to avoid all situations where their low core skills may be revealed to others.

Early trauma or poor early learning experiences

- Enduring impacts of early trauma/ life experiences on their capacity to learn into adulthood including:
 - neglect or physical, sexual, psychological and/or emotional abuse.
 - negative experiences of education or learning e.g. being bullied, not receiving enough help at school, undiagnosed learning disabilities and low aspirations/ expectations.

Attitudes/beliefs

- A belief that low literacy is a person's 'lot in life' and that change is unlikely or impossible.
- Some did not believe learning worthwhile because it did not lead to work.
- A belief that finishing Grade 10 is 'enough education' or the 'end of education'.
- Wanting to continue to 'get by' on their own, rather than seek any help or assistance from others.
- Viewing their primary role as a mother/carer in the home.

Goals/information

- Leaving school with no clear goal.
- Lack of knowledge about what is available or possible.

Social factors

- The pressure to 'earn', rather than 'learn' in order to simply meet the general costs of living or to acquire goods such as TV's, cars and phones. Disengaged adults were more likely to see the idea of attending a literacy program as wasting time that could be better spent on finding work.
- Interruption to schooling caused by high rate of teenage pregnancy amongst young people from low socio-economic backgrounds.
- The disengaged group included many young parents who were in some instances caring for up to five or six children. These parents were busy looking after their children and were too tired to consider learning. If they had any time in their lives for themselves, spending time improving their literacy skills was not a priority.
- Providing care for others e.g. disabled, elderly, children with special needs, injured or sick and those living with a mental illness.
- Family breakdown or a lack of family support, especially for single parents.

Impact of life events

- Living with or recovering from the grief associated with divorce, death of a spouse/child, or from serious accident, illness or injury of oneself or others.

- Many people had previously worked and had injuries or health conditions that limited the types of work they felt they could do. This contributed to low expectations and low motivation.

Cost

- Being unable to afford the perceived or actual costs associated with taking up learning i.e. tuition fees, travel and childcare.

Structural barriers

- Limitations on the number of core skill learning hours adults on benefits/pensions are permitted to undertake i.e. four blocks of 200 hours. Centrelink also requires a six month break between each block of literacy learning.
- Changes in personal circumstances (such as getting married) as the key eligibility criteria to access certain Centrelink payments or other services, rather than the individual's level of core skills.
- The Reading Writing Hotline has proved disappointing to some people with low literacy as they did not receive the information or support that they were seeking.

CALD background

- Belonging to a cultural community that does not speak English outside of English classes.
- Limited opportunity to form friendships with other English speaking adults in order to practice English.
- Few opportunities for CALD adults to consolidate their learning in the workplace.

- Courses offered to adults from CALD backgrounds are generally for low skilled work, despite many CALD adults holding tertiary qualifications from their country of origin.

Pathways

- Lack of collaboration between organisations and services which results in some adults slipping through the gaps.
- Lack of support for adults transitioning from different learning environments and levels to other more advanced programs or courses.
- No clear pathways or supported progression into work experience placements or paid employment.
- Too much emphasis on training and attending courses.
- Lack of work placements for people with low core skills to improve their literacy on the job.

Disability/mental health

- Adults with disabilities and mental health issues describe 'being in the too hard basket' when it comes to receiving assistance to take courses and to find employment.
- Extra support may be needed for some people including programs tailored to their specific needs.

Criminal conviction

- Some adults with previous convictions for petty crimes, that were often committed in their late teens and early twenties, had reduced motivation to learn because most believed they would never be able to gain any meaningful employment.

3 Motivating Factors

Engaged adults

Engaged adults provided the following reasons for attending literacy programs:

To learn

- Some engaged adults simply stated that they were engaged in literacy programs because they wanted to learn to read, write, spell, speak or do maths.
- For these individuals, engaging in literacy programs was a life changing experience and often something they had not had the opportunity to do before.

Motivated by personality

- For some people, taking up learning was primarily attributed to internal or personal attributes, such as personality, or being curious or optimistic by nature.

Pursue a goal/interest

- Engaged adults were more inclined to have a clear goal or objective for learning or improving core skills, eg. wanting to write a book, use technology, get a job or help their children to learn.

Feel useful/or heard

- Some adults wanted to improve their core skills in order to express their opinions or point of view or simply to participate fully in community life.

Increase confidence

- An outcome of and motivation for continued participation in literacy programs was an increased overall self-confidence or sense

of self-worth among participants. Increasing their skills and knowledge was a way of feeling better about themselves.

Staying connected

- Many engaged adults saw learning as a means of staying connected with others or reducing their feelings of loneliness and isolation.

Supporting children with learning

- Many engaged adults wanted to improve their core skills so they could assist children to learn.

Life events that trigger change/ new directions

- Motivation for learning was often triggered by major life events, such as the loss of a job, divorce, caring for others, or the death of a partner, child, sibling etc. that made people reassess their lives.

Quality of the teaching/ learning environment

- Some of the engaged adults stated that they were motivated by programs offering:
 - one-on-one tutoring
 - teachers / tutors who were sensitive to and interested in their individual circumstances/ needs
 - relevant curricula
 - recognition of different skill levels
 - targeted individual or small group learning
 - teachers or tutors who wouldn't judge them so they could feel good about themselves
 - teachers and other service staff who see and work with the

individual and their strengths and capabilities rather than just any condition the individual may be experiencing e.g. people with a disability or mental health issue.

Benefit or pension requirement

- Some adults stated that they were initially motivated to attend literacy programs due to the fear of losing their Centrelink pension/benefit.
- Many stated that their motivation often shifted after the initial few visits.

Pathways into work

- Engaged adult learners saw core skills programs as providing them with a pathway into further training education, work experience or employment.

Programs combining practical & communication skills

- Many engaged adults, especially those from CALD communities, wanted programs where they could combine learning a practical skill and practise their English skills at the same time. For example, a number of driving programs have recently been set up by various community organisations in which volunteers accompany adult learner drivers. They engage in English conversation while clocking up driving hours.
- Others wanted more opportunities to share their own practical skills/knowledge with others while at the same time finding from others how to improve their own learning.

Disengaged Adults

Although many of the disengaged group had little awareness of the core skills programs they could attend, it was a lack of motivation rather than lack of awareness that was the primary reason behind their lack of participation. Therefore, the interviewees were characterised by their lack of motivation and often an associated sense of disempowerment. However, when asked about what would motivate them to attend core skills programs, they did discuss a number of factors:

The need to have a goal

- Many of the disengaged adults had very limited goals for themselves. Many were disempowered and 'accepted their lot'. They struggled to see any intrinsic value in attending a core skills program. Some said they would be more motivated to attend if they could see a link between improving their skills and a clear goal, such as gaining employment.

Tangible benefits

- Many said they would be more inclined to attend if there were tangible benefits flowing directly and immediately from completing a program. For example: the guarantee of a job; or a pathway into work experience placements or other training.
- The disengaged group were more likely to see the idea of attending a literacy program as wasting time that could be better spent on finding work to improve their situation.

- This group did not want to be tied up in courses or programs that would distract them or get in the way of taking up any work opportunities that might arise.
- Approximately one third of the disengaged adults had some form of employment, and those in part-time or casual work were often motivated to find either permanent part-time work, or increased casual hours.
- Those who were motivated to increase their income were generally seeking the same or similar work to that which they had done before (e.g. supermarket checkout, kitchen hand, cooking, childcare, cleaning). They felt they could do these positions without necessarily needing to improve their core skills.

Financial incentives

- A number suggested that financial incentives would make attendance more attractive. For example, increased benefits or pensions, as well as covering travel costs.
- The cost and difficulty of arranging childcare was a barrier for many parents, and this would need to be accounted for in considering appropriate financial incentives.

Obligations for payments

- Some considered it reasonable for Centrelink to oblige payment recipients to engage in some sort of training. It was notable that several people in the engaged group mentioned that while an obligation to attend was one trigger that led to them to commence a course, the benefits they accumulated from

attendance soon became the dominant factor in maintaining their engagement.

Community venues

- Disengaged adults stated that they would be more inclined to take up learning core skills if the programs were held at a community venue they felt comfortable attending, such as men's sheds, sporting clubs or social clubs.
- Indigenous adults stated that they would be more comfortable undertaking a literacy program at a community facility run by an Aboriginal service.
- Many interviewees, particularly in rural areas, stated that they would not take up core skills learning if it were offered in libraries.
- Their perceptions of libraries were often formed in their childhood and some thought of them as overly quiet and unappealing places – not a natural location for people with low literacy.
- Others, particularly those in smaller towns, felt they would be under scrutiny and risked humiliation by having their low skills exposed.

Embedded literacy

- Disengaged adults were generally more interested in learning core skills if they were embedded in other types of programs or skill-based activities such as cooking classes, woodwork, mechanics, or how to improve the management of your club.
- Some linked this not only to the content of the activities, but also the location, preferring community venues they were familiar with – as mentioned above.

Home tutoring

- Some adults felt that they simply could not engage in learning in a community setting. These adults lacked the confidence to attend a community facility to learn core skills and many stated that they would only engage if, at least initially, they could do so in the privacy of their own homes.

Don't call it 'Literacy'

- Disengaged adults, particularly those from low socio-economic backgrounds or from rural and remote areas, wanted the word 'literacy' removed from the name, title or description of programs available to assist adults with learning. Many felt that the word 'literacy' was very offputting; that in most people's minds it was too closely associated with being 'dumb'.
- However, adults (engaged or disengaged) from a higher socio-economic status did not see a problem with using the word 'literacy'.

Promotion of literacy programs

- Many of the disengaged adults did not know where to go to get help.
- Television was seen as the best means of promoting literacy programs.
- Some suggested advertising campaigns showing famous people with low core skills who had improved their lives through attending programs. Others felt that ordinary people with low core skills who were charismatic speakers could give talks to groups of people with low core skills.

- Many felt that they had wasted years of their lives, especially between the ages of 20 and 30, hoping that something, such as a good job, would eventually come along. When this didn't happen they suddenly realised that they had lost a decade when they could have been improving themselves. Many thought that if someone they could relate to had talked to them about not waiting, they may have engaged in learning many years earlier.

Changing community attitudes

- Some people thought that advertising or promotional materials needed to target the general community with the aim of reducing the stigma associated with low core skills. They themselves would then be more inclined to engage.

4 Supporting Ongoing Participation

Engaged and disengaged adults made the following suggestions on how to support ongoing engagement:

Attitudes/beliefs

- Promotion of lifelong learning to help shift the belief that education is only for younger people and finishes after year 10.

Teachers/tutors

- Non-judgmental teachers/tutors
- Curricula that are relevant to each individual/ groups overall goals/motivations.
- Program staff that do more than teach, by providing support and advocacy to assist learners from one level/environment to another.

- Teachers who recognise and work with the individual and their strengths and capabilities rather than limit them through their attitudes toward any conditions they may be experiencing, e.g. people living with disabilities or mental health issues.

Program design

- Having programs that are ongoing and that have some stability and continuity in terms of staff was also very important. Having to reveal the secret of low literacy to as few people as possible was important for many adults.

Reciprocity - engaging by giving and receiving

- Adults with low core skills want to be acknowledged for the other skills and abilities they have acquired throughout their lives and want an opportunity to share these skills/ abilities with others.
- Helping others with lower levels of literacy than themselves.

Greater involvement in program design and delivery

- The research found that the people most likely to know adults with low core skills were other adults with low core skills. A major theme to emerge was that those with very low levels of literacy currently rely on others with marginally better core skills than themselves to cope with the demands of everyday life.
- Greater involvement of adults with low core skills in the design, development and delivery of core skills programs would be a way of reaching those with the greatest needs.

CALD communities

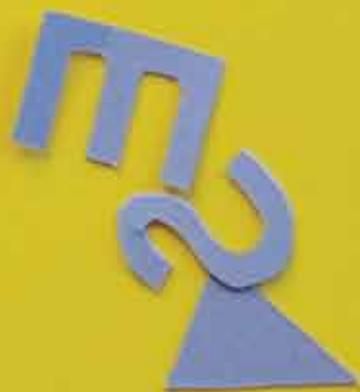
- The Nepalese community in Launceston runs their own core skills and English classes on weekends. Younger members of the community who attend literacy programs during the week become the teachers for their community on the weekend. This example provides a model of communities helping themselves. LINC and literacy programs could provide additional assistance and support for such activities.
- Having bilingual workers available to support new arrivals and those who have become disengaged from learning leading to long-term unemployment.
- Understanding the particular needs of each cultural community. Interviews with members of three cultural groups (Ethiopian, Nepalese and Italian) in this research illustrated the differing needs and motivations of each group. There is a need for cultural education/ understanding by teachers/tutors and program designers to be culturally responsive to individual community groups.
- Understanding the different needs of older migrants and new entrants.

END NOTES

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The basic things that you need in day-to-day life but it's hard to do extra things.

It's the little things that you learn in the classes that give me another little edge.



People who lack literacy skills make up for it in different ways. The idea that someone is dumb is stupid.