

QUEST

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Learning to scuba dive offers a range of health and wellbeing benefits to people with disabilities.

Diving with a disability

A scuba diving training program is changing lives for people with disabilities who are swapping wheelchairs for water.

Mark Slings had just qualified as a diving instructor in Thailand when he had a fall from a balcony that left him a paraplegic.

'My boss said "Why don't you come back to work to see if you can still teach?" – ever since then I've been trying to get more people in my position to enjoy the benefits of scuba.'

Mark is one of the founders of Disabled Divers International (DDI), a non profit organisation that conducts disabled scuba diving training programs for professional and non-professional students. So far he's taught 200 instructors around the world how to teach disabled learners to dive.

Mark includes an introduction to different conditions

'There's no such thing as a wheelchair diver. If you're in the water you're a diver. It's a great leveller.'

including Cerebral Palsy, spinal injury, Downs Syndrome in the training but he keeps it brief. 'Everyone is different as to what they can and can't do so it's important to treat each disabled learner diver as an individual.'

For people who are wheelchair bound, diving is exhilarating, Mark says. 'There's nothing like it.'

'We call ourselves life changers because you see the change in people who think they can't do it and they do it and get this huge sense of achievement. So often people with disabilities get messages from people around them about what they can't do.'

Awareness of the positive health and social benefits of diving has increased dramatically over the last 20 years with both the US and UK military adopting it as a part of their rehabilitation program with disabled veterans and people who've been in combat.

'There's a real interest from dive professionals wanting to run these sorts of programs. And because Australia is one of the best diving places on earth Aussie dive teachers are very keen,' Mark says.

(Story continues on p. 3)

 <https://www.ala.asn.au>

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*Lifelong and
lifewide learning
for all Australians*

Message from the CEO



Our pre-budget submission targeted additional support for engaging the disadvantaged and the culturally diverse with learning; later life learning for older Australians; supporting family learning and learning in regional and rural Australia.

Welcome to the first edition of *Quest* for 2016.

This year is an election year and leading up to that is the Turnbull Government's Budget in May. Adult Learning Australia submitted a 2016–2017 pre-budget submission which you can view at our <https://ala.asn.au/submissions>.

ALA's pre-budget submission is focussed on policies that promote fair, inclusive and productive communities. We are keen to influence the broader policy debate in a way that achieves quality learning outcomes, increased productivity, improved wellbeing, community cohesion and civic engagement.

Some of our recommendations to the Commonwealth are to:

- formalise the role played by ACE providers in attracting socially and economically marginalised groups and disengaged learners, including young people who have failed in mainstream schooling
- continue to promote later life learning including digital literacy for seniors
- invest in a national literacy strategy
- support a family learning approach to literacy
- commit to enabling access to learning for adults in rural and regional Australia
- recognise adult learning as a key strategy for Australia to achieve its commitment to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

The achievements of the adult and community education sector are significant in building individual and community capacity within Australia. An increased focus from government will result in even stronger outcomes, particularly for people who have been socially and economically marginalised.

I am pleased to say that Adult Learning Australia has received funding from the Commonwealth to deliver a research project that will provide insight into the outcomes that adult and community education delivers across Australia. The project will continue to inform government of not only the economic benefit but also the social and community value the ACE sector offers across Australia.

Adult Learning Australia has its upcoming Board elections in April and this is an opportunity for ALA members to nominate. If you would like to find out more about how you can be involved to further the work of Australia's peak organisation for ACE in Australia, please refer to our website or you can contact the President via email at info@ala.asn.au.

There are so many inspirational stories in the first edition of *Quest* for 2016. They highlight how adult learning empowers people. I hope you find them inspirational as well. I would like to acknowledge our communications project officer, Gina Perry, who does a fantastic job putting together each edition of *Quest*.

We are always looking for stories that inform and promote adult learning in Australia and the Asia Pacific. Please feel free to forward story ideas and news items to Gina at g.perry@ala.asn.au or share them with us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).



Celebrating the dive at Rockingham beach.

(story continued from p. 1)

Ash – dive instructor

Ash Payne of Perth's Dive Unlimited was inspired to take up DDI Instructor training after one of his student's friends who was in a wheelchair came along to watch them dive. 'He said, "I wish I could do that!" and I thought, "Why can't you?"'

In 2015 Ash undertook the first DDI Instructor Training course in Australia with Mark Slingo. It was a great experience, Ash said, but the real learning was in running his first class. Held over three days, with one day in a pool and two days in the open water, the class attracted six students.

As a swimming teacher and a dive instructor Ash had plenty of experience teaching a wide variety of people, and adapting and modifying his techniques. But running a class for people in wheelchairs was a 'hell of a learning curve. It was like the first time I'd taught able bodied people how to dive.'

Ash thinks he's a better teacher as a result. 'Beforehand my approach was to outline the steps, do this, then this, then this. But all that goes out the window when you're teaching people with mobility problems. Now I've become more focussed on how individual people pick up things.'

Ash says diving is a great way of getting some exercise as well as having fun. 'You can go diving for a whole day and spend maybe 2 hours in the water. The rest of the time is spent chatting on shore, having coffee together before the dive, or going to the pub afterwards so it's a very social hobby.'

Cassandra – dive student

Cassandra Burrell grew up spending a lot of time at the beach and always wanted to be a marine biologist. But a mitochondrial disease means that since age 7 Cassandra's been in a wheelchair. Not that that's stopped her enjoying sport. She's an active member of the WA Wheelchair Sports Association and has enjoyed competing in boccia, swimming and field events. She now does archery and scuba diving.

She'd always wanted to try scuba diving and recent

'The joy of it, that sense of peace and weightlessness and no pain is why I choose to do it. Being under the water is like being in another world!'

developments in accessible equipment and training courses have made it a much more inclusive sport.

She did her training with dive instructors Ash Payne and Kamila Opon and said the course was excellent. 'They adapted their teaching and really catered to my needs.' Graduating from the swimming pool to the ocean was really exciting Cassandra says but the dive was almost derailed because the water pressure was making her ears ache. 'I didn't think I was going to get too far down there because my ears were playing up. I had to keep going up towards the surface to equalize them, back and forth for about ten minutes.'

But it was all worth it. 'The freedom that you feel with no weight, the peace and tranquility are just beautiful. I swam past the same reef maybe ten times and each time I'd see something different.'

She's done another three dives since then and each one gets easier, with less to worry about as she develops confidence. Buoyancy has been the biggest problem. 'The biggest challenge was the buoyancy vest but after two sessions I'd worked on my technique. Relying on just your arms and hands to swim is tricky too because you don't want to disturb the sand or you don't see anything.'

'The first two dives someone is with you the whole time, practising things with you that you've learned in the pool like taking your mask off; taking your regulator out and retrieving it; checking depth and air gauges and practising hand signals. By the third dive, things are easier to remember and you can concentrate on swimming and looking at what's around you.'

'We went to Rockingham Beach which has a dive trail where they've put in a plane and a boat that's covered with coral forms. Swimming round the reef I saw a school of 40–50 pearl coloured fish, seahorses on the lines, and crabs walking on the sand. I had to remember not to hold my breath and keep breathing!' Cassandra has to space out her diving because it takes a toll on her physically but she says it's worth it. 'I'm quite happy to just conk out for a couple of days afterwards.'

Next up Cassandra would love to explore further afield, diving at Rottneest Island, or doing some night dives. And hopefully seeing some sharks in their natural environment.

<https://www.ddivers.org/>

Devonport commits to lifelong learning

Devonport Tasmania has launched a Live & Learn Strategy to set a new direction for the city and establish a flourishing culture of lifelong learning.



Mayor Steve Martin sees the potential for lifelong learning.

Devonport Mayor, Alderman Steve Martin left school at 16 then returned to study in 2011 aged 52 as a business student at University of Tasmania.

'Back in high school I was good at maths but I was very poor at English. So here I was at the age of 52 having to write all these 3000 word assignments. When I was at high school I didn't write 3000 words a year! It really got my adrenalin going, it was a real buzz and I got a great sense of achievement out of it.'

Now Mayor Martin wants his whole city to get excited about learning.

It was during his university studies as a mature aged student that he stumbled across the idea of learning communities. What if the Devonport region which has faced plenty of challenges – high unemployment, falling school retention and low levels of literacy and numeracy – adopted a whole of community approach to learning?

'It was like a light went on in my head. If we could put lifelong learning at the centre of a strategy we could improve Devonport's social, cultural, economic and environmental wellbeing.'

Devonport Council brought together 150 representatives from education, community, industry, youth and government sectors to come up with a plan for how to lead, inspire and motivate the community to embrace lifelong learning.

Mayor Martin said that everyone involved has become aware

Learning cities refers to a new approach to urban development where learning is a key tool for social inclusion and urban generation. Strategies are developed through active partnerships between cities, towns and communities.

that there is a vast amount of educational opportunities – formal and informal – already available in the area.

Making the community aware of the range of learning experiences going on in their city and viewing themselves as learners is an important part of the cultural shift, Mayor Martin says. For example, when people are given a demonstration and a chance to practise how to tune an engine at a local motor show, that activity should be recognised and valued as a successful learning opportunity.

Organisations can benefit from partnerships with other community organisations as a great way of learning from each other. Local charities, for example, could collaborate with other charities share knowledge, skills and people.

In response to poor school retention rates Mayor Martin is enthusiastic about the idea of a sports academy for young locals to offer training programs in sports event management, administration and coaching.

'We are sports mad on the north west coast. It would be great to tap into that to attract young people back to learning. Sport teaches you about leadership skills, about how to work as part of a team. You also need maths to understand scoring, manual dexterity skills for ball handling, and an understanding of aerodynamics to better bounce and kick a ball. Sport is not just about physical fitness. And it is a terrific way to get young people back into learning.'

Employment opportunities in Devonport are set to get a boost with a planned \$250m Living City development in Devonport and the Australian Masters Games which the city will host in 2017.

'By embracing lifelong learning as a community we believe that we'll be prepared to take advantage of the many opportunities which are set to come our way over the next decade.'

<http://www.devonport.tas.gov.au/News-Media/Strategy-to-develop-a-City-of-learners>

Tips for taking control of your website

If you've outsourced management of your website you know making changes and updates can be difficult and costly. An outdated website can be worse than no website at all. But changes in web publishing make updating and maintaining a website easier than it's ever been.



Here's our tips on taking back control of your website.

1 Choose an intuitive content management system (CMS)

A user friendly CMS such as WordPress or Joomla helps you and your team feel confident in making changes that are as quick and easy as posting to Facebook.

2 Select a theme or template that matches your website goals

Make a list of what you want your visitors to be able to do on your site to help you narrow down the choice of theme. For example, you might want space for news, videos and an online booking form.

3 Use responsive design

Make sure your site is easy to read and navigate on a mobile phone, a tablet or a desktop computer. Responsive design adapts the appearance of your website to the screen size of the device that a person is using to look at your website.

4 Draw a diagram or site map

This will show all the pages on your site and their relationship to one another to guide you in where to place your content.

5 Hire a professional designer

Develop a design brief describing the image you are trying to project and who your target audience is. Get your designer to develop a website colour palette based on your logo.

6 Invest in good, professional photographs

Good pictures can evoke mood, project your organisation's personality and have a big impact. Avoid

using generic photos. They imply your organisation is generic when it's not. Good photography draws the eye and creates an emotional connection to the written content. Bad or irrelevant photographs are actually worse than having no photographs at all.

7 Use colour strategically

Where possible, use a neutral colour palette to project a clean and modern appearance. Small dashes of colour – for headings and key graphics – help to guide visitors to your most important content.

8 Choose fonts that are easy to read and accessible on a range of devices and browsers

The font size should be no less than 12 pt but bigger is better. The harder your text is to read, the less of it will get read – even less will be understood.

9 Don't assume people will visit your homepage first

Site visitors from search engines may arrive on a page deep in your site so make sure each page makes sense on its own and makes a good impression.

10 Make your site findable by search engines

The words you use in key places such as page titles and link text on your website are important. Search engines also value sites that are updated regularly, that other credible sites link to, and ones that are active in social media.

First aid for mental health

Diamond Valley Learning Centre in Melbourne is running mental health first aid courses to help staff and students develop skills to identify and help others who are struggling emotionally.



Opening up the conversation is a first step in offering support.

If a tutor or student accidentally cuts themselves during a cooking class or hammers a finger instead of a nail in a workshop, you know to reach immediately for the first aid kit. But what do you do when someone in your centre is having a mental health crisis?

Diamond Valley Learning Centre recently ran its first Mental Health First Aid course to find out. The course trained participants in how to recognise when someone is going through a mental health crisis, and how to help them get through it.

Course leader and mental health first aid instructor Francis Acquah has 25 years experience as a mental health nurse. He knows from first hand experience how important it is for people who might be struggling emotionally to get help sooner rather than later.

'As a mental health nurse I worked in triage, at the preventative end of the service where we were able to assess people and do some early intervention. But I'd go and visit the ward and there'd be all these people who'd been admitted because they might have been violent or they'd been brought in by the police. It was so frustrating because so many people didn't seek help until they'd hit rock bottom.'

You don't have to be a mental health professional to be helpful, Francis says. Learning the skills for making that first approach and taking that first step to talk about what might be troubling someone is key.

'We can often feel fearful about approaching someone we see might be suffering. But you don't have to be an expert to offer someone support.'

'We need mental health first aid trained people because, particularly in some CALD communities, the stigma and taboo really gets in the way of people admitting they have a problem, let alone asking for help.'

'I teach people how to assess situations and listen non judgmentally, to invite the person to talk about the problem and follow up afterwards. Having the skills and the right approach you can make a big difference in people's lives.'

'I aim to give people a good knowledge of warning signs of depression and anxiety, drug and alcohol problems so they can intervene early and make sure people get help.'

The course is not designed to turn participants into psychologists, or to teach people how to diagnose or treat a mental illness, much like someone trained in physical first aid isn't expected to be able to set a broken arm. But it does help people pick up mental distress signals.

Francis has taught doctors, nurses, financial counsellors, lawyers and adult educators – anyone who might be working with people who could be in mental health distress.

The twelve-hour class is structured around an action plan that covers steps including how to approach, listen and give support to someone in distress and how to encourage them to seek help.

'Every class is different. I tailor the training to the needs of the group. But I always include opportunities for people to talk, share experiences and interact. I use video, group work, scenarios and small group discussion – all of these help participants develop confidence and skills and knowledge.'

For most of us a piece of bread burning in a toaster that triggers a fire alarm is little more than an annoying interruption to our work day. But for people from war torn countries or who've experienced bushfire, a fire alarm can trigger panic and distress.

Renee DeBeer, Diamond Valley Learning Centre's volunteer coordinator says it is incidents like these that prompted her to investigate setting up a Mental Health First Aid course.

'I wanted to get the knowledge and the tools to be able to approach people I can see might be struggling and to be able to better nurture our team of volunteers.'



Diamond Valley Learning Centre's first mental health first aid class celebrates their graduation.

'It was a fantastic course. I feel well equipped and know now what to say and what not to say. I'm more observant now. I notice symptoms and signals. For example, I'll notice now if someone seems a bit withdrawn, or if their work isn't up to scratch or if they might look unusually scruffy. I see these signals and I'll make an approach and say, "Are you all right, do you need to talk?"'

'In the past I wouldn't have said anything and I'd leave people to battle on their own because I wouldn't have known what to say and I'd be worried about making things worse.'

'We have a lot of EAL students and we really have no idea what they have been through before they came here. It's very hard for them to find work, they have visa worries, money worries and so they're under a lot of stress.'

'Diamond Valley Learning Centre is a lively vibrant place, there's always food on the table, people to meet and talk to and that attracts our volunteers. But regardless of the brave, professional mask people put on, for some volunteers it can be hard not to bring their problems to work. Some of our volunteers are looking for a social environment to work in because their partner has died or their family has moved away. Others are people wanting to get back into the workforce and are working here to help them get back into the swing of things and they can face all sorts of pressure too.'

Renee has used the training a lot since she completed the course. Now she feels more able to talk to someone she notices might be having difficulty.

'I will take the person aside and ask them how they're going. Often that's all the invitation people need and they might

say "I'm having a terrible day" or "Things at home are really bad".'

Her goal is to help people with information and support until they can get professional help. Renee says she's overcome her fear of saying the wrong thing and is more confident about broaching the subject of mental health. She believes she's a better people manager as a result.

Diamond Valley Learning Centre <https://www.dvlc.org.au/>

Mental Health First Aid Australia <https://mhfa.com.au/>

Photo credit:

Counselling and Support by www.houghtonphotography.com, CC BY SA 2.0

Are you an ALA member?

Becoming a member of Adult Learning Australia is a fantastic way to support lifelong and lifewide learning across Australia.

To find out more about all the benefits of an ALA membership, go to:
www.ala.asn.au/join-now



The first Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training course was developed in Australia in 2000. Since then it has been offered in every Australian state and territory and has been adopted and adapted for use in 23 other countries.

QUEST

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**Adult
Learning
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*Lifelong and
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ALA Board vacancies

Are you someone who's committed to adult education and lifelong learning? Feel like you've got something to contribute to the field? We are currently seeking nominations for our Board.

Board membership is a great opportunity for learning new skills and ways of working and it offers the chance to really make a difference. We're looking for people whose expertise and insight can help ALA remain a powerful and effective organisation representing adult and community education around Australia.

Nominations open on March 1 and close on 1 April. Elections will be held in April and new Board members will be announced at our AGM on April 29.

For more information go to:

<https://ala.asn.au/ala-board-nominations-now-open/>

Broadband for Seniors – volunteer tutors wanted

We're looking for people who have the technology skills and the time to work as volunteer tutors at a Broadband for Seniors kiosk. In a kiosk, the tutor's role is to provide face-to-face training for senior Australians in computers and the Internet. It's rewarding work and you don't need to be a computer specialist, just have a good understanding of technology and a willingness to get involved. As a tutor you get lots of support through our online community, training, support, resources and professional development.

To register your interest in becoming a volunteer in the Broadband for Seniors program, please complete the form on this web page:

<http://bfseniors.com.au/become-a-bfs-volunteer/>

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