

Summary

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Voluntary tutor: Read Write Now [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The House Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training enquiry into and report on adult literacy, numeracy and problem-solving skills in Australia, including but not limited to:

Terms of Reference

- The relationship between adult literacy, numeracy and problem-solving skills and socio-demographic characteristics, particularly migrant status
- The effect that literacy and numeracy skills have on an individual's labour force participation and wages
- Links between literacy and social outcomes such as health, poverty, ability to care for other family members and participation in civic life
- The availability, impact and effectiveness of adult literacy and numeracy educational programs in Australia and internationally

I have been B's tutor for four months. B is 50 years old and been resident in Australia 25 years from a country in Africa. Last year she was channeled to Read Write Now (RWN) through a job agency because she was unemployable due to illiteracy. She has raised six children (four of whom have, or are studying a university degree, and two are in high school). Until fairly recently, B has rarely ventured out of her house other than to shop close-by, supervise her children at recreation activities and to drop and collect her children from school. She has links with her own community with whom she only speaks that language.

While tutoring B in pre-beginner English. I discovered that B's lack of literacy was causing widespread difficulties in her life:

B was having a great deal of difficulty attending to appointments for her many health issues, due to [REDACTED]. She was unable to keep track of her appointments, unable to understand verbal communication, read written communication and unable to express herself in English. Long awaited specialist appointments were missed causing chronic pain, further deterioration and mental anguish, necessitating the lengthy process of new referrals and appointments. I have been happy to act as advocate for B, acting as intermediary and accompanying her to some appointments.

B has asked me to advocate for her with the Housing Authority as she feels unable to express herself adequately and wants to understand fully their communication.

B is dependent on a number of benefits from Centrelink. She was fearful of missing her reporting (of income) day and not receiving her payment. She had not been taught how to use a calendar. She would also physically attend the Centrelink office each fortnight because she was not aware of the MyGov app on which she could report. These issues have been remedied, however B is dependent on her daughter to navigate the MyGov app for reporting on her behalf. B no longer overburdens her short-term memory now she can use a calendar on which she writes 'R' to remind her to report to Centrelink, 'A' for an appointment (and the time). This has alleviated anxiety.

B had felt disinclined to leave her house for many years, other than for essential purposes because of her illiteracy. With knowledge that she has support, and her growing confidence, B wants to assert her independence and pursue engagement in activities she had previously suppressed. This has greatly improved her mental wellbeing.

With assistance, she has obtained her own public transport card which facilitates the use of public transport, and understands how to use it.

B professed an interest in learning to swim. She has cultural dress requirements. With support she purchased suitable swimming attire online and I am happy to act as mentor in navigating the rules around use of the pools and spa. The spa has proved soothing for her back pain.

B is now able to use her mobile phone to send basic written messages accompanied by emojis, such as 'Hi', 'OK' 'no' and 'go'. She can for example, identify the difference between shampoo and conditioner by focusing on the first letter of each, and identify a bus lane at the bus station by letter. She can read basic (consonant vowel consonant) CVC readers to her grandchild. Despite her slow, deliberate progress, B's emerging literacy is opening opportunities which have been closed to her and she feels a strong sense of confidence, accomplishment and well being.

B's dependance on me will diminish over time as her needs are met and she continues to make progress in literacy. She is immensely grateful to me for assisting her which is heartfelt. In the

meantime I have great admiration for her strength and determination and am happy to assist her to reach her goals.

