

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO ADULT LITERACY - Submission

To Whom It May Concern,

I am a volunteer tutor with the Read Write Now (RWN) program in WA, and have been for the last 5 years. I am passionate about improving literacy in our society, as I love reading, and feel great sadness for those that are unable to get the same enjoyment from it that I do. Poor literacy is a significant problem, and it is likely to cause social isolation, feelings of hopelessness, poor or no job prospects, and a withdrawal from society.

My current RWN student is a lady from a [REDACTED] background, who was a [REDACTED] in [REDACTED]. She is highly intelligent, and has an extremely high level of literacy in her native language, but was struggling to communicate in English here. While her husband went to work and her children went to school, she was not getting exposed to regular English, and was isolated at home, too embarrassed to integrate with others.

We worked together on various activities to improve her vocabulary, and confidence in speaking, writing and understanding English, with an aim to raise her confidence to the point of being able to apply for a job here. Unfortunately, this plan was derailed when she was diagnosed with stage 2 breast cancer, and began immediate treatment. Our lessons then changed to have a significant focus on medical terminology and how to effectively communicate with, and understand the doctors, nurses and other allied health professionals that were involved in her care. She has since told me that her numerous stays in hospital were much less stressful due to the tutoring she had received, and was very grateful for the improvement in her confidence with communicating in English, both written and verbal.

She is very pleased to now be able to understand easily the written communications from the hospital clinics she is still a patient of and the schools her children attend. Also, she is no longer afraid to send notes back to the teachers. During the COVID-19 school shut down last year when school work was being done from home, she was able to help her children understand the concepts in English, which would not have been possible before, and her children would have been significantly disadvantaged. Work-wise, I am pleased to say she has some volunteer roles teaching Korean to children of English-speaking backgrounds, as well as writing some online articles on things to see and do in Western Australia, targeted to an international audience. Her English literacy and self-esteem improves every day, and she is now confidently filling out the many forms required during applications for things such as school scholarships, rental houses, housing loans and the like.

I am thrilled to have played a small part in improving her literacy, independence and confidence, as well as her job prospects here in Australia, and only wish that I had more time in which I could help more adults that have been brave enough to ask for help in literacy. The importance of adult literacy can not be downplayed- those with poor literacy miss out on a lot. It is virtually impossible to apply for assistance (ie Centrelink payments) without a basic level of literacy, so these people get left behind in more ways than one.

Improving literacy not only increases financial and health literacy, but self-esteem, social confidence and civic participation, which then reduces the demands on welfare agencies. I strongly believe that any monetary outlay spent on improving adult literacy would significantly reduce expenditure in social welfare areas.

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