

Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education
References Committee

Inquiry into the progress and future direction of life-long learning

Submission no: 5

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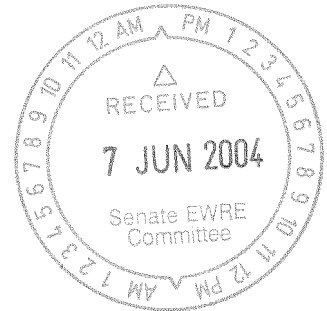
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THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN OF WA Inc

Affiliated with The National Council of Women of Australia and The International Council of Women

PATRON: Mrs. Lorraine Sanderson PRESIDENT: Mrs. Geraldine W Campbell BA(Hons) Dip.Ed



The Chairperson
Senate Employment, Workplace Relations & Education
References Committee
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam,

Regarding your recent call for Submissions relating to Life-long Learning, please find attached a document researched and prepared by our Adviser responsible for monitoring this portfolio.

It is a concise document, tightly to the point, and we trust that your Committee will give it full consideration.

As this issue is of great concern to us, we would appreciate being kept informed on the work of your Committee and, particularly, on its outcomes.

I look forward to hearing from you in due course.

Yours faithfully,

Geraldine W Campbell BA(Hons) Dip.Ed
President

3 June 2004

The National Council of Women of Australia is a voluntary organisation working for the advancement of women through a vast network of affiliated organisations and individual associate members. NCWA is a member of The International Council of Women which has consultative status (Category 1) with the United Nations Economic & Social Council.

The National Council of Women of WA (Inc) is affiliated with The National Council of Women of Australia. It is non-party political and composed of Delegates from affiliated organisations and Associate Members. It is a forum for all members to bring forward subjects for discussion.

The National Council of Women of WA (Inc) puts forward this submission to the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education References Committee.

The huge expansion in the use of computer technology over the past decade has led to the increasing educational and participatory isolation of a significant sector of the Aging population in Western Australia.

The availability of life-long learning programmes is essential for the individual, and social health and wellbeing of the mature-aged population. Computer and Internet literacy are essential pre-requisites in today's learning environment.

Those individuals already retired from the work environment prior to 1997 (when use of the Internet as a means for communication and dissemination of public information increased dramatically) have become increasingly isolated and disadvantaged by their lack of access to computers and inadequate computer skills.

While the Council recognises that there are a number of excellent training courses for the mature aged group within the Perth Metropolitan Area, these programmes are highly popular, quickly booked out, and are unable to satisfy the current demand. This leaves a significant section of the mature aged population without access to Information Technology training and, therefore, denied the skills they require to cope with everyday use of the Internet as a means of information provision, communication and community involvement.

The Internet is increasingly used as the primary medium for dissemination of crucial public resource material including information on health, welfare, pensions, service provision and other Federal, State and Local Government information. It is rapidly becoming the primary tool for the conduct of business including, for example, banking and travel arrangements including timetables and bookings. In fact, many businesses and service providers now impose surcharges for provision of information, statements, or other resource material by postal or other non-Internet means.

When these problems are transposed to Seniors living in the rural and regional areas of the vast state of Western Australia, the practical difficulties of achieving computer literacy increase exponentially.

Reasons include:

- Distances between major towns in rural and regional Western Australia
- Poor telephone and, therefore, Internet reception due to “black holes” in the satellite telephone system
- Adverse climatic conditions including cyclones, flooding or other natural phenomena which interrupt reception.
- The impracticality of connection to the main electricity grid often due to extreme distances from rural towns, necessitating the use of solar power or generators, limiting the availability of sufficient power for prolonged computer or Internet use.

In current society retirees are highly sought after as volunteers, mentors, and social and cultural contributors. With the explosion in Information Technology usage it is imperative that training be provided to enable these highly useful individuals to fulfil their potential. Without basic computer skills many of the opportunities for active involvement and social contribution are denied to this important and growing section of the population.

At the other end of the scale are those mature-aged individuals isolated by ill health or disabilities associated with aging, whose lives would be greatly enhanced by access to and competence in computer usage. For these people the ability to interact and communicate with the outside world via the Internet would reopen social, cultural and, indeed, emotional opportunities beyond earlier imagination.

The National Council of Women of WA (Inc) requests that the Committee considers:

1. a recommendation for an immediate injection of funds for the increased provision of Information Technology training courses for the mature aged population of Western Australia.
2. a recommendation for the establishment and maintenance of fully equipped Information Technology Training Centres in both Metropolitan and Regional / Rural Western Australia. (e.g. The Information Technology Training Centre established and operated by community organisations in cooperation with Telstra and Government departments in Launceston, Tasmania. This training centre has provided a high standard of tuition for mature aged participants for several years).
3. the introduction of a subsidy scheme to encourage the purchase of computers by mature aged learners participating in a registered training course, with particular attention to residents of rural and regional areas of Western Australia.
4. a recommendation for the funding of ‘visiting’ Information Technology Trainers, able to provide in-home training for those persons not able to participate in centre-based training programmes due to disability or frailty.