

The Value of Adult and Community Education (ACE) - Key Messages

The attached paper presents international evidence on the value of adult and community education or lifelong learning. The weight of the evidence is summarised in the following key messages.

- There is significant value in investing in adult and community education (ACE), to the individual, family or whānau, community, society and the economy. When positive adult learning opportunities are accessible society benefits from more active citizenship, greater educational and economic outcomes and reduced health and social costs.
- Lifelong learning empowers adults by giving them the knowledge and skills to better their lives, their families and their communities.
- ACE as part of a lifelong learning journey, happens in many settings (formal, informal, in an institution, at home or work) and includes a wide variety of learning areas (budgeting, literacy, languages, numeracy, and professional development). ACE also offers a “fresh start” to adults whose compulsory education was unsuccessful.
- ACE learner outcomes data show increases in learner confidence, ability to participate in their families and communities and greater hope for their future, particularly in respect of employment and further learning.
- Intergenerational learning where generations learn or study together to gain skills, values and knowledge, builds social cohesion in our aging societies. Lifelong learning within a community brings strength and resilience to its members. Adult learning positively impacts on youth learning outcomes. Ensuring adults have access to quality learning experiences is key to maintaining these positive outcomes.
- In times of fiscal constraint, “targeted funding” affects the kinds of learner opportunities ACE is able to provide. It also restricts the learner’s ability to self-direct their learning and creates the risk among those with “high learning needs” of total disengagement from learning.
- While lifelong learning may include literacy, language and numeracy, it is also about enriching individuals and in turn enriching those around them.
- As a sector, ACE has pioneered many educational innovations that are now part of educational provision (prison education, adult literacy, women’s studies, Treaty of Waitangi education, correspondence programmes).

The Value Proposition of Adult and Community Education (ACE)

“Education that Adults require to stay relevant to the society they live in now”

Purpose

This policy discussion paper is the first of three papers about Adult and Community Education (ACE) in Aotearoa. The purpose of this paper is to explore and promote discussion about the “value” of ACE to the individual, the community, society and the economy. It describes the ACE sector in its entirety rather than focussing only on ‘government funded’ ACE programmes and proposes new ways of looking at the valuable contribution of ACE in the present day.

What is Adult and Community Education (ACE)?

ACE occurs alongside the formal education system and is accessible to all.

The Māori concept of “ako or akonga” describes the process of learning in pre-European Aotearoa.¹ Apart from formal teaching and learning of sacred knowledge (whare wānanga) ako was not bound by age, gender or social status. One element of ako has been described as being informal learning where important life skills relating to survival were taught through everyday life and activities. There is much literature on the concept of ako but for the purposes of this paper Māori adult learning happened in and within the whānau and community.

Adult and Community Education (ACE) is part of New Zealand’s tertiary and broader education sector. Its beginnings span as far back as 1895² with the introduction of the Manual Technical Instruction Act which allowed the establishment of technical schools and colleges where evening classes for adults and young people included general subjects (English and arts) as well as technical. Community-based programmes grew out of the development of the Workers’ Educational Association (WEA) in the early 1900’s.³

ACE is identified in many forms including informal education and non-formal education, post-compulsory education, adult learning, lifelong learning, leisure and recreation learning. Through ACE adults may choose to engage in a range of education activities within the community. It provides individual and group learning and promotes whānau empowerment, equity, active citizenship, critical and social awareness and sustainable development. ACE can occur in a range of contexts in both structured and spontaneous forms, all of which have their own value. It may be initiated by individual and group needs which encourage adults to learn to understand their world and to seek change within it.⁴

¹ Pihama L, Smith K, Taki M, Lee J, “A Literature Review on Kaupapa Maori and Maori Education Pedagogy” Prepared for ITP New Zealand, by The International Research Institute for Maori and Indigenous Education, 2004, pg 13

² Benseman J, Findsen B, Scott M, The Fourth Sector – *Adult and community Education in Aotearoa/New Zealand*, 1996, pg 23

³ Ibid pg 23

⁴ The Report of the Adult Education and Community Learning Working Party “*Koia Koia, Towards a Learning Society – The Role of Adult and Community Education*”, July 2001, pg 8

High quality ACE is the on-going, up-skilling and empowerment of the adult population, and an efficient and effective use of resources.⁵

What is community education?

Community education includes some forms of 'community-oriented' education offered by institutions. But it also consists of those forms of education which are undertaken by community groups and voluntary organisations. ACE occurs in the community, with and for the community.

Learning is essential to life

Learning is essential for all human beings. Our ability to learn, change and adapt to environmental demands makes learning a continuous practice, particularly when that learning impacts on the quality of life we experience. People must learn in order to survive wherever they are situated so they are able to make their own decisions and implement those decisions for themselves.⁶

Some learning will be 'incidental learning' which has been described as "some form of indirect/additional/unplanned learning within an informal or formal learning situation."⁷ And some learning will be organized in a structured environment, explicitly defined as 'learning', leading to a qualification.

In New Zealand formal primary and secondary education is compulsory from the ages of 6 – 16 years. A person may expect to enrol in an education facility, learn and gain a qualification. Equally a person may enrol in an educational facility, learn and not gain a qualification. But learning still occurs. Some of that learning will be 'incidental learning' which translates into the individual's self perception of "brainy or dumb"; the other part of that learning will determine the individual's attitude toward structured learning, through repeated success or failure in the education system. A negative educational experience can result in an attitude of "this is boring, irrelevant and not for me".⁸ Unless a successful intervention occurs at a point where the individual is motivated to change, that negative attitude will persist into adulthood and possibly for their "whole life".⁹

For many the experience of failure in the compulsory education system leaves them with a resistant attitude toward formal or structured learning. ACE can play an important role with these learners as many are attracted to the informal learning style that ACE offers.

ACE - Lifelong Learning

The concept of Life-long learning grew from two UNESCO reports¹⁰ which pointed to the need for a learning culture that is open to all, embraces all learning, (informal and non-formal

⁵Harre Hindmarsh J. (1993). Community and Continuing Education in 1992: Trends and Issues. *New Zealand Annual Review of Education*, 2, 179-204

⁶ <http://infed.org/mobi/julius-nyerere-lifelong-learning-and-education/>

⁷ http://edutechwiki.unige.ch/en/Incidental_learning

⁸ Lake, J "The Value of Lifelong Learning" – Abstract, for *The Tertiary Education Summit 2013, Auckland, December 2012*

⁹ Faure, *Learning to Be: The World of Education Today and Tomorrow*, 1972, Delores, *Learning: The Treasure Within*, 1996

¹⁰ UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (2009): *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education*, p22

education) and takes place in all spheres of an adult's life (at home, work or in the community). It was described by the Adult Education and Community Learning Working Party set up in 2001 in the following way:

“Lifelong learning is a central component of all OECD countries. Increasingly, the importance of non-formal and informal learning in a variety of settings – at home, in work, and in the community has come to be recognised in this context. For many people, ACE is what makes lifelong learning possible.”¹¹

Life-long learning is popular amongst adult New Zealanders who make the choice to pursue further learning for many reasons. For some learners ACE provides a “fresh start” at learning following an unsuccessful formal compulsory education experience. For immigrant learners ACE can assist their integration into New Zealand society and prepare them for future employment. For expectant parents ACE offers a way to learn and prepare for parenthood. Other learners come to ACE to prepare for a new hobby or recreational activity, to learn how to use the latest technology and for the aged, to improve social engagement and productive activity.

“As far back as 1900, Dewey had asserted that adult education is at once an entitlement and a public good, to which all should have access, but in which all equally have a responsibility to participate – in the interests of building and sustaining democracy.”¹²

As such ACE in New Zealand forms an integral part of the lifelong learning journey.

Why is ACE important to New Zealand?

Leading international organisations including the OECD and UNESCO emphasise the importance of Adult Education to the world and all nations.

“Adult learning counts more than ever in the era of globalisation characterised by rapid change, integration and technological advances. Learning empowers adults by giving them the knowledge and skills to better their lives. But it also benefits their families, communities and societies. Adult education plays an influential role in poverty reduction, improving health and nutrition and promoting sustainable environmental practices.”¹³

ACE provision in New Zealand plays a key role as it reaches some of the most vulnerable people in society including current priority groups (Māori, Pasifika and youth) within their own communities, as well as being accessible to all. Some ACE providers work with communities to address their needs, allowing people to construct their own learning journey.

ACE in New Zealand has been instrumental in educating for cultural revitalisation, raising political and environmental awareness, and assisting adult learners to become proactive, engaged citizens.

Internationally, basic education (literacy, language and numeracy) is typically the focus for ACE. These areas are vitally important especially for adults who have not been successful

¹² Global Report on Adult Learning and Education p14, UNESCO (2009)

¹³ Ibid at note 9, pg14

in their compulsory education. ACE is often a safety net for these learners but it is also a source of ongoing enrichment.

Value of ACE

The benefits for individuals, family/whānau, associated with adult learning, and the benefits which are evident in a positive learning focused community ultimately translate to benefits for the nation.

There is a growing body of research that supports the social and economic benefits of ACE within society.¹⁴ ACE provides adult learners with the skills and knowledge required for today's knowledge-based society as well as improvement in the following:

- financial literacy
- embedding literacy and numeracy, workplace literacy
- improving digital literacy
- trades skill, professional “currency” learning
- self-confidence
- work ethic
- tikanga and te reo Māori
- English language

There is now a strong body of research¹⁵ showing the wider benefits of learning provided in ACE programmes. Positive learning experiences not only have an impact in terms of educational outcomes, but also in other spheres of people's lives that are of interest to government. This research shows that ACE contributes to better health,¹⁶ reduction in re-offending,¹⁷ increased productivity and income,¹⁸ and increased social and community participation.¹⁹ A study conducted in the State of Victoria, Australia, in 2008 indicated that 'market benefits' (increased productivity, leading to increased wages from paid employment) of ACE were estimated to contribute a positive fiscal benefit to the Victorian Government of \$27 million over a 24 year period.²⁰ Comparative research on the contribution of ACE to New Zealand's economy, to the reduction of public health and justice costs, increased productivity and income generating tax revenue and increased social and community participation is needed to support anecdotal and qualitative evidence of ACE's contribution in New Zealand.

Research from the United Kingdom has shown that the following benefits can also be achieved with ACE:

- people who participate in learning are 14% more likely to give up smoking as a result (positive health outcome, reduction in health services costs)

¹⁴ Leach L, *ACE in Aotearoa/New Zealand 2000-2008*, Journal of Adult Learning. Burnheim C, *Education and Social Capital*, October 2004,

¹⁵ <http://www.learningbenefits.net/>

¹⁶ <http://www.educationmattersi.e/2011/03/01/study-finds-community-education-more-than-pays-for-itself/>

¹⁷ Marix Knowledge Group, 2007, cited in *IFLL Thematic Paper 5 – Crime and Lifelong Learning* – cited in NIACE – the Facts, <http://www.niace.org.uk/thefacts>

¹⁸ Allen Group, *The Economic Benefit of Investment in Adult Community Education in Victoria*, 2008, ix

¹⁹ Allen Group, *The Economic Benefit of Investment in Adult Community Education in Victoria*, 2008, x.

²⁰ Allen Group, *The Economic Benefit of Investment in Adult Community Education in Victoria*, 2008, x.

- men with no qualifications who gain a level 1 qualification are up to 50% less likely to become obese (positive health outcome, reduction in health service costs)
- taking women without qualifications to level 2 would reduce their risk of depression by 15% (improved social participation).
- taking leisure or academic courses increases race tolerance by up to 94% (improved social cohesion, potential reduction justice service costs).²¹

Other positive benefits of ACE can be seen amongst the aged. Studies have shown that older people who participate regularly in organised groups, such as learning groups, benefit significantly in health and well being.²² Also, learning activities for older people in care homes can increase quality of life, as well as reduce health and social care costs.²³

ACE – the Economic Imperative

The Tertiary Education Strategy 2010-2015 (TES) is part of New Zealand’s legislative framework for Education and is currently being updated. It is due for consultation in late 2013 with roll-out in 2014. The current TES (2010-2015) states that a world-leading education system is an important first step towards a productive and growing economy that delivers greater prosperity, security and opportunity for all New Zealanders. It sees that high quality tertiary education will increase people’s employment opportunities and productive skills base to drive economic growth.²⁴ The TES gives explicit recognition of ACE’s role in adult education through its broader education goals and the following priority focus areas:

- Serve learners whose first learning experience was unsuccessful
- Assist those seeking pathways into tertiary learning
- Assist people who lack the literacy, language and numeracy skills for work and further study.²⁵

It must be noted that while raising foundation skills and offering learning opportunities to those whose initial learning was not successful is an important part of ACE, providing educational opportunities to strengthen social cohesion, enrich intergenerational learning, and provide a platform for participatory citizenship are also important. ACE plays an important role within the wider education sector and views education as part of a learning process.

Better Public Service Goals

As part of its Better Public Services (BPS) programme the government has charged the Ministry of Education (and the Tertiary Education Commission) with taking the lead on meeting specific targets within the tertiary/ACE sector.

Although the targets are ambitious the Ministry acknowledges that a collaborative effort from the entire education sector is required to achieve them. They are:

²¹ NIACE (National Institute of Adult and Community Education) – The Facts- <http://www.niace.org.uk/thefacts>

²² Putnam;2000; *Bowling Alone* – Cited in ‘NIACE – The Facts <http://www.niace.org.uk/thefacts>

²³ Enhancing Informal Adult Learning of Older People in Care setting: Interim Report and Consultation Document; NICE – cited in in ‘NIACE – The Facts <http://www.niace.org.uk/thefacts>

²⁴ Office of the Minister of Tertiary Education “*Tertiary Education Strategy 2010-2015*”

²⁵ Ibid above, pg 20.

- In 2017, 85% of 18 year olds will have achieved NCEA level 2 or an equivalent qualification.
- In 2017, 55% of 25-34 year olds will have a qualification at level 4 or above.

ACE provides education opportunities across a broad continuum. Many community-run ACE courses up-skill learners (youth and adult) with high literacy and numeracy needs as well as poor self-esteem but may not award certification or formal qualifications (such as NCEA or Unit Standards). Other courses may provide qualifications up to level three but it is unusual to find an ACE course that provides opportunities to gain qualifications up to level 4 or above. ACE is a pathway to increasing the number of adults with qualifications.

Youth Guarantee

The purpose of the Youth Guarantee is to provide new opportunities for 16 and 17 year olds, currently not engaged in education to achieve education success, to progress into further education, training or employment. From 2014 the Youth Guarantee scheme will be extended to 18 and 19 year olds and foundation education (Level 1 and 2 courses) will become fees-free for 20-24 year olds. The goal of The Youth Guarantee programme is that all young people will achieve level 2 NCEA, which is seen as the minimum qualification for success.²⁶

A range of government-funded programmes including Vocational Pathways, Secondary-Tertiary programmes, Fees-free places in tertiary institutions and organisations, places in Trades and Services academies are now available to encourage youth learners to engage in higher education and vocational training.

Comment

It is acknowledged that both the BPS targets and the Youth Guarantee programme are targeted to particular age groups of learners and seek to provide the broadest of options for youth and younger adults (to age 34) to gain qualifications to level 4.

ACE providers attract reasonable numbers from this demographic (17–20 year olds without qualifications) who have left school with no qualifications and often no skills or confidence in their ability to learn but see ACE as another chance. This may have helped foster the perception that ACE is primarily a “bridging programme” or “pathway” to higher tertiary level study in formal tertiary education institutions. While this is an important part of what ACE providers do, the enduring aim of the wider ACE sector is to provide opportunities for ‘Lifelong Learning’.

Intergenerational Learning

Intergenerational Learning has been described as:

“a way that people of all ages can learn together and from each other. It is an important part of Lifelong Learning, where the generations work together to gain skills, values and knowledge. Beyond the transfer of knowledge, [it] fosters reciprocal

²⁶ <http://www.minedu.govt.nz/theMinistry/EducationInitiatives/YouthGuarantee/AboutYouthGuarantee.aspx>

learning relationships between different generations and helps to develop social capital and social cohesion in our ageing societies.”²⁷

The influence of family, parents and extended family on a person’s lifelong learning journey can be powerful. Equally it can be a negative influence. In New Zealand it has been found that children who live in families with high levels of parental education and access to learning resources have higher achievement than children whose families do not have these resources.²⁸

Adult learning has positive effects on families. ACE providers in schools (adult literacy night classes) have found that adult learning programmes have a positive impact on the achievement levels of the school students, and increase the confidence, employment and further education of parents and the health and wellbeing of their families.²⁹

Many ACE practitioners and providers report that often when young people who learnt they were a ‘failure’ at school, become parents, a new learning opportunity is created through ACE parenting courses. In learning how to parent well, become engaged in their child’s pre-school and then school experiences, these young parents then go on to increase their own directed learning experiences. There is also strong evidence of these changes in the family literacy literature.^{30 31}

Achieving positive youth learning outcomes requires consideration of the importance and accessibility of learning opportunities available to the adults around them. It may be timely to look at how ACE could be involved in the government’s Social Sector Trials.

ACE – in times of fiscal restraint

The Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy (CAAL) based in the United States, recently published findings on short term priorities for adult literacy in an environment of fiscal constraint. The report recognises during these times clear priorities for change are required in order that progress be made. Through a survey “highly regarded educational leaders” were asked to indicate their top 2-3 priorities for the near term. The report found strong convergence of opinion in four areas of questioning. The strongest recommendation was that the current instructional model in adult education programmes should undergo major change. The dominant model should become “managed enrolment classes that are ‘high intensity’”, it was agreed that an emphasis on high intensity yields greater and faster positive results. The report recognised however that for some this approach could be a barrier.

“Students with multiple barriers to attendance and especially very low-level proficiency would be less likely to make a commitment to such a [managed

²⁷ <http://www.emil-network.eu/about/what-is-intergenerational-learning>

²⁸ Biddulph F,J,C, *The Complexity of Community and Family Influences on Children’s Achievement in New Zealand: Best Evidence Synthesis*, June 2003, , pg iii

²⁹ ACE Aotearoa, Adult and Community Education, *Autumn Newsletter 2012*, pg3

³⁰ Askov, E., Saenz, E., Grinder, E., Kinney, S., & Marvin, M. (2003). *Goodling Institute for Research in Family Literacy: annotated bibliography*.

³¹ Desforges, C., & Abouchar, A. (2003). *The impact of parental involvement, parental support and family education on pupil achievements and adjustment: a literature review. (RR433)*. London: Department for Education and Skills.

enrolment, high intensity] programme. On the whole these students are the hardest to serve by any means and they require a great deal of individualised instruction.”³²

The report also acknowledged that with a change in the delivery model, high needs learners may disengage altogether from ACE and others may still not be ready to continue onto higher level study. Once again this group could be overlooked and underserved. Other recommendations for near term prioritisation included professional development for staff, increased use of technology and creative fundraising.

ACE learner outcomes

The ACE Learner Outcomes project (outcomes project) is a collaborative sector project, undertaken as part of the ACE Sector Professional Development Contract. It focuses on developing a process to gather data on learner outcomes, to demonstrate what ACE learners gain from participating in adult education. Previously ACE providers have been able to demonstrate the quality of their teaching and the high levels of learner satisfaction with their tutoring and learning. However providers have not been able to show that learners have achieved outcomes which could impact their further participation in work or higher learning.

The ACE Learner Outcomes tool has been trialled with a limited number of providers over the period August 2012 to March 2013. The aggregated results show that overall, learners who participate in ACE courses, (irrespective of time of year, nature or location of course, or size of class) report an increase in each of confidence (in a range of situations), positive participation and hope for future (improved prospects of employment or further study). Under the project, each provider owns their data, and can analyse it in more detail. A working party is finalising responses to feedback from the trial with a view to making the revised tool available to any providers who wish to use it.

Educational Qualifications

In today’s society there is a strong emphasis on the attainment of educational qualifications as they are linked to labour force status and income. Research shows that average earnings are 18% higher for those with a tertiary education compared to those with only upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education.³³

A formal school qualification is a measure of a person’s readiness for higher education, training and entry-level employment. In 2009, New Zealanders with no qualifications had 59% of the relative earning power of those with a Bachelor degree or higher, on average (OECD 2011).³⁴

Census 2006 data shows that the number and proportion of New Zealand’s population holding higher-level qualifications is increasing but there are significant differences in educational attainment in terms of age, gender and ethnicity.

³² Chisman R & Spangenberg G, “*In a Time of Scarc Resources – Near Term Priorities in Adult Education*”, July 2012, Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy, pg 6

³³ <http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/indicators/main/education-and-learning-outcomes/1919>

³⁴ *Ibid*, 1891

ACE – a safety net for those who fall through the cracks?

Census data indicates that in the decade from 1991 to 2000, approximately 9,000 young people left high schools each year with no formal school qualifications. Ministry of Education data recorded that between 16 and 19 percent of school leavers from 1991 to 2000 had no qualifications. That equates to 90,000 people without qualifications in that decade alone.

In the same decade (1991 -2000) Māori students are over-represented among school leavers with no qualifications, forming between 16 and 18 percent of all school leavers yet between 36 and 39 percent of school leavers with no qualifications.

Pacific students were also over-represented among school leavers with no qualifications, forming 6 to 7 percent of all school leavers yet 9 to 10 percent of school leavers with no qualifications.³⁵

“The increasing labour market demand for young people with upper secondary and tertiary education qualifications foreshadows an increasing risk of exclusion for those individuals with lower attainment.

International data suggest that on average across the OECD, tertiary education more than halves the expected period of unemployment over a working life.”³⁶

Many adult learners who enter ACE are representative of the statistics outlined above. They come to ACE seeking a fresh start to their lifelong learning journey whether it leads them to further higher tertiary study or better employment opportunities.

The diversity of ACE provision in responding to learner needs

ACE is delivered across all parts of the tertiary sector. This paper focuses primarily on ACE in communities, PTE’s, community organisations, REAPs and in Schools, funded and unfunded. Since 2009 government funding for ACE provision has reduced.

ACE provision is wide-ranging with a myriad of courses. Often communities will run an ACE programme in partnership with regional and district councils, government agencies or private businesses depending on local needs. An example of community partnership in ACE is the Kaikoura Menz Shed. Around 15% of Kaikoura region’s population is aged 65 and over. In response the community set up a Kaikoura Menz Shed. Menz sheds bring men together in one community space to share their skills, have a laugh, and work on practical tasks individually (personal projects) or as a group (for the Shed or community).³⁷ There are Menz Sheds groups across New Zealand.

One of the ACE courses offered at the Menz Shed is “Kai for the Guy”, where many of the older men, widowers and single, learn to cook more nutritious meals for themselves. The Menz Shed is also linked in with and supports the Council’s Environmental and Social Sustainability policy.

³⁵ http://www.stats.govt.nz/browse_for_stats/education_and_training/secondary_education/school-leavers-with-no-qualifications/summary.aspx

³⁶ *ibid* at note 5

³⁷ <http://menssheds.org.nz/about-2/>

The Kaikoura community also identified a lack of training opportunities for youth who did not finish school, so working with Kaikoura High School ACE, a Certificate in Rural Machinery course was developed as a joint venture with Agribusiness. Other courses being offered are Relief Milking and Pastures where learners interact with local farmers with the end result being a strong sustainable community.

Another example of informal ACE in communities is H.A.N.D.S (How About Non Dollar System) Community Education programme, a local employment and trading system that relies on people's willingness to share their knowledge and experience in exchange for in-kind favours or kiwi dollars. The types of courses offered are: An Introduction to Beekeeping, Drawing, French, Intensive Gardening, Permaculture, Scrapbooking and Papercraft, Healthy Respectful Parent-Child Relationships, the Tao of Health, Photoshop Exploration and Handmade Christmas Cards. The group has no legal status and receives no financial support.

Riverslea Tu Tangata Charitable Trust, works from the grounds of Riverslea Primary School where its main activity was making lunches for school children. In turn parents were asked to volunteer their time to assist, work in the school gardens or read with their child. It was found that many parents could not read so parent/whānau reading programmes began. Many people who come to the Trust need basic lifeskills, budgeting and self-esteem. The Trust assists working aged people to prepare for employment including, writing a CV, applying for jobs and mock job interviews. Other participants of this programme have gone onto further tertiary study (Foundation Certificate in Social Work and Nursing, Teacher Aide courses).

English Language Partners New Zealand (ELP) works with refugees and migrants who wish to learn English. Volunteers and teachers deliver a range of English-language programmes in partnership with new migrants and refugees. Based in learning centres around the country ELP has around 6,500 adult learners, 3000 volunteers working from 23 locations.

The future provision of ACE is evolving however it will continue to adapt to the needs of the community and be mindful of learners and learning environments including technological advancements which impact provision.

ACE - part of the fabric of our Society

The collective vision of the ACE sector is much wider than is currently perceived by government. ACE when interwoven into the fabric of modern society transforms communities and whānau.

“People will come to ACE to gain the skills and knowledge that will keep them up to date for full participation in their whānau, communities and society”.³⁸

In its Strategic Plan, ACE Aotearoa acknowledges that going forward the ACE sector will continue to assist adult learners to both “recognise” and “reach” their learning potential, scaffolding learners into higher level tertiary education or assisting their transition to employment or more challenging areas of employment and possibly a higher income bracket. It also acknowledges that even if the compulsory education system was working

³⁸ ACE Aotearoa Strategic Plan 2011-2015, pg 14

perfectly and all learners graduated with qualifications there would still be a vital need for ACE to enable adults to keep their skills and knowledge current.

“ACE is no longer needed to provide the learning that people missed out on in their earlier education and is the connection place for enriched intergenerational learning.”³⁹

ACE supports learners in their quest to stay current and up to date with societal and technological advancement by providing community driven education that encourages citizens to actively participate in society at all levels. Key to producing an environment of active citizenship within communities is strong support for ‘intergenerational learning’ directed and delivered by community and whānau.

Summary

This paper outlines the value of adult and community education to the individual, family or whānau, community, society and the economy. Learning is essential to life, promotes health and wellbeing, encourages active participation in society and raises environmental awareness, at the individual, familial and community level.

Learning can happen in any setting, formal, informal, in an institution or in an unstructured manner. Adult and Community Education provides the opportunity for many adults to continue learning, empowering them to make better decisions for themselves, their families and their communities.

“People learn what they live” and where positive learning opportunities are made accessible society benefits from more active citizenship, low negative health outcomes and greater educational and economic outcomes that lead to reduced costs to government in these areas.

Intergenerational learning where generations work together to gain skills, values and knowledge, builds social cohesion in our aging societies. Lifelong learning within a community brings strength and resilience to its members.

While lifelong learning may include acquiring literacy and numeracy skills to improve employability it is also about enriching individuals and in turn enriching those around them.

The next discussion paper will look at policy decision-making and its affect on ACE provision, in the past and into the future. It will ask the question “What is government’s role in adult and community education.”

³⁹Ibid above, pg 2