

“He was learning to read, but  
he wasn’t learning to live.”



Socially inclusive learning in a community setting

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*Illustrations by Portia Graf*



*in partnership with*



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# DEDICATION

This report is dedicated to Carmel Rosella whose strength, dedication and courage made the Reading and Writing Group a possibility.

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## Acknowledgements

First and foremost we would like to acknowledge the participants of the Reading and Writing Group who shared their goals, provided insights and were happy to have researchers hanging around the community classroom week after week. Their courage and determination to learn was inspirational. We are especially in debt to the staff and volunteers who shared their knowledge and wisdom about community based literacy. We would also like to thank the dedicated members of the Research Project Reference Group who expertly guided all stages of the research from its inception to producing the final version of the report, including Alison Little, Dr Lynda Shevellar, Neil Barringham, Pat Strong, Damian Le Goullon and Leanne Wood. We would also like to acknowledge Paulo Cafe and Ricki Berkowitz who helped with observations and literature review respectively. Thanks as well to the Anglicare Southern Qld for funding the research and the Anglicare Southern Queensland Human Research Ethics Committee who assessed the project proposal and gave valuable feedback.

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## Glossary

**A Place to Belong** – a community based agency that serves as the administrator of the Reading and Writing project and its partner in fostering social inclusion and connectedness.  
[aplacetobelong.org.au/](http://aplacetobelong.org.au/)

**Alina** – an agency administered by Anglicare Southern Qld that works alongside families and women with intellectual disability and or learning difficulties within the Greater Brisbane Region.

**Anglicare Southern Qld** – the service delivery arm of the Anglican Church Southern Queensland.

**Community meal** – a fortnightly evening meal in a local church hall in West End, usually attended by about forty people who bring food to share.

**Drug Arm van** – an outreach service of Drug Arm, a not-for-profit organisation committed to reducing harms associated with alcohol and other drug use. The van provides food, coffee and other support.

**VET** – Vocational Education and Training programs, including Technical and Further Education institutions.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



People with mental health problems, learning difficulties and poor literacy and numeracy are at risk of social exclusion including homelessness. They are often disconnected from the Vocational Education and Training (VET) system, with few opportunities for education and employment. Academic research has demonstrated a link between literacy and numeracy and social inclusion, however, the pathways to enact this are not well understood.

This report presents insights into how a community based adult literacy program in West End, Brisbane, was first established and has since evolved into a successful model of what we are calling 'socially inclusive learning'. The research informing the report was conducted as a twelve-month study from April 2013 to April 2014 funded through a partnership involving Anglicare Southern Queensland, A Place to Belong and the School of Public Health and Social Work, Queensland University of Technology. The research was conducted by Greg Marston and Jeffrey Johnson-Abdelmalik.

The aim of the study was to clarify the principles, practice and methodology of the Reading and Writing group (hereafter RAW) and identify the characteristics of RAW that support the social inclusion of the individual being provided literacy learning. The questions guiding the research included:

- What are the key principles and practices of the RAW model?
- How does the acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills contribute to the recovery of people with mental health and other issues?
- How can the acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills support people's social inclusion, including achieving employment and further education outcomes?

A related aim of the project was to document how this community based literacy and numeracy program operates so that other organisations with an interest in addressing similar needs can learn from the model, particularly organisations that co-locate support and education and organisations that adopt a recovery approach when working with people with mental health challenges and intellectual and psychiatric disabilities.

The report highlights the background to RAW, the learning philosophy of RAW, the profile of the participants in the program and the various roles and responsibilities and structure that supports the work of RAW. The report presents perspectives from the teachers, student participants and tutors on how the group is designed and the principles implemented.





# KEY FINDINGS

## 1) Joining up literacy and support – socially inclusive learning



education and human services are often separated in both policy and practice. As (Balatti, Black et al. 2009) recognise in their proposal to change the literacy teaching paradigm the link between literacy training and social inclusion is missing in Australia. Moreover, people from disadvantaged backgrounds or living with a disability have often been required to go to mainstream education providers if they want to improve their literacy, rather than education being tailored and delivered in a way that is accessible.

The pedagogy of RAW is based on the belief that successful literacy learning for adults takes place when that learning is linked to what people want to achieve more generally in their life. Each adult learner is given the opportunity to choose a program of direct instruction and design a program of learning themselves. So some participants learn to read articles about bodybuilding because they are interested in going to the gym, others learn basic computer programming because they have an interest in technology, some act out role-plays or sing because they enjoy performing. The teachers and tutors make effort to ensure that the learning remains relevant to the learner.

As the person begins to articulate their learning goals, other needs and aspirations become apparent, such as a desire to live independently, be more mobile and write creative works. In the report we refer to the relationship between initial learning needs (the desire to read and write) and more fundamental personal goals (such as greater control and autonomy) as the distinction between “second order” and “first order” needs. The presenting reason for learning to read and write, may be as simple as “I want to be able to read bus names”. However, as the student and teacher/tutor partnership becomes more trusting, the student may reveal deeper reasons for why they want to be literate. These needs are the powerful ‘drivers’ for improvement and change, and include such things as a longing to have friends, to be accepted with respect, and to live independently.

Telling stories and revealing aspects of one’s life as a narrative is an important way at getting at the deeper first order needs. Articulating one’s journey allows people to express where they have been and where they want to go. One of the keys to the success of the RAW model is its ability to work on multiple levels so that education and skills acquisition becomes an experience that is transformative of selves and community. In Damian Le Goullon’s words (the RAW teacher), “Literacy is inclusion”.

The model of social inclusion practice that emerges from the research works at three levels. The first and most important level is individual; the person is identifying his or her own goals around social connection, and the service is providing support for that. Secondly, RAW materialises a level of community connectedness. This is where the connection between literacy and social inclusion is worked through on a principle of people “self-directing” their learning around first order and other needs. The third level is systemic, engagement with community groups, private providers and government organisations to facilitate pathways to greater autonomy and participation in society.

What emerges in the connection between literacy and the social world is a definition of social inclusion that engages with:

- intrinsic motivation;
- gaining power over one's life (both big and small changes);
- gaining power and control over one's mental health;
- acquisition of valued roles, respectful recognition;
- narrative and voice and self-advocacy;
- connection with family and friends and
- the opportunity to develop creative, employment or education pathways.

This vision of social inclusion is much “thicker” than the narrow version of social inclusion that has often informed official social policy frameworks.

## **2) Learning outcomes**

The research revealed that there were a range of tangible and intangible outcomes for RAW participants. Some of the former students interviewed during the course of the study had gone on to paid employment, independent living and mainstream education. Others had become more mobile in their communities through their ability to read bus and train timetables. Some had proudly written their first book, first poem or performed music in a public setting. Some ex-students had even returned as volunteers or part-time employees in the program, modelling their newly acquired skills and confidence for the benefit of others.

In contrast to narrow conceptions of social inclusion that privilege paid employment as the key marker of citizenship status, the RAW participants demonstrated that there are multiple conceptions of what mastery and competence looks like. Despite not being under pressure to conform to externally imposed measures of success within a set timeframe, it is clear that RAW does teach people to read and write during their time in the program, but much more than this it also encourages and actively supports people to try out their new skills in making community connections, making art, making a home or making money.

The founder of RAW, Carmel Rosella, embodied these possibilities. Her story is discussed in the report and the report is dedicated to her. By sharing her personal story, Carmel gave hope to other people who felt excluded by mainstream learning and education. Carmel's vision forms the foundation of RAW – that is recognising that everyone has a right to learning and literacy across the lifespan and that positive educational experiences in safe and supportive learning environments reinforce and develop people's strengths, unique talents and capacities.

## **3) The pedagogy of RAW**

The RAW teaching philosophy, or pedagogy, draws on approaches to literacy and human service delivery that are complementary. From literacy theory, RAW bases its approach on a model of multiliteracy that acknowledges that narrowly tying literacy to economic opportunity drives a ‘test and compliance’ model, which leads to a narrowing down and loss of the range of literacies, and the important skills of self-expression. And from human services the RAW model draws on capabilities and strengths-based frameworks and community development principles of inclusiveness, collaboration and partnership. The research found that there is a close match between the espoused pedagogy of RAW and the pedagogy as practiced.

There was an observed understanding among tutors and the teacher that learning is dialogical, that assessment and diagnosis come after – not before – spending considerable time with students, and that learning goals and learning styles need to be individually tailored if they are to engage the learner and keep them returning each week to class. All of these characteristics were observed and documented during the course of the study. The fact that there was a very high retention of RAW participants from week to week is an indicator of how successful the framework is.

The acquisition of literacy is a portal to the enjoyment of life, to recovery from mental distress and to the growth of the individual. It is centrally about communication, and its elements, phonics, spelling and grammar and numeric skills. Literacy education must provide people with these core skills. However, literacy is also about how literacy is used in local networks and communities, about the acquisition of valued social roles and power over one's own life, about in short, increasing people's capabilities to live an active life.

#### **4) The importance of learning partnerships**

Mapping the student's skills and the requisite skills for social inclusion requires orientation in the learning process, which is achieved through learning partnerships.

The research found that volunteer tutors, working in conjunction with the teacher to find innovative and creative solutions to learning barriers and challenges is a key feature of the day-to-day work of RAW. Volunteer tutors and the teacher are patient, persistent and good humored. These qualities were found to be extremely conducive to reducing anxiety about learning, which can in and of itself be a substantial barrier to learning. Some of the participants needed constant encouragement to take greater control of their learning needs, particularly those participants who were more used to a traditional teacher-student relationship where the teacher is the authority figure. It was not uncommon to hear some students say when asked what they wanted to do next, "you're the teacher, you tell me". Giving students the confidence to articulate their needs and rights was something that was constantly being fostered in these learning partnerships. Over time, one of the participants became very determined to put self-determination into action, expressed in his poem that is reproduced in the report, 'Nobody Owns People'.

#### **5) Policy paradigms exclude community based literacy**

The review of literacy policy in Australia demonstrates that at the national level there are only two policy paradigms that are recognised in Australia – literacy for paid employment and literacy for children. Community based literacy programs, which have demonstrated potential to support adults with mental health and complex issues are not a significant part of the formulation of policy options either at a State or Federal level.





# STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT



There are a number of audiences for this report. Among them are people in the community who are thinking of setting up community-based literacy learning groups and would like some guidance about how to do this; community practitioners who would be interested in the relationship of literacy and connection to the community; professionals who are already engaged in the field who are interested in how other groups work with people; policy advisers to government and to nonprofit organisations and finally academics. Some people may also just be interested in what is happening in the West End community. In order to cater to these different interests this report has been structured in the following way:

## Place

This section locates RAW, in its relationship with its sponsor organisation A Place to Belong and the West End community. It begins with the life of Carmel Rosella who was the inspiration and power behind the Reading and Writing Group, and who exemplifies how the achievement of literacy is integral to the achievement of social inclusion.

## People

The second section of the research is called “People”. This section is aimed at people who are interested in how literacy practically impacts on social inclusion and community connection. It tells the stories of people in ordinary language.

## Practice

The third section is aimed at people interested in getting some guidance on establishing such groups in the community, and at professionals already in the field who may be interested in how to link literacy to social inclusion. It is more technical and pedagogical and refers to some specific academic and educational frameworks around both literacy and social inclusion work that are useful. This section is called “Practice”.

## Policy

The fourth section is aimed at policy professionals and academics. It is intended to draw out the social policy implications of this model of learning in a way that contextualises it within the policy frameworks of literacy and social inclusion. This section is called “Policy”. In addition, for those to whom it may be relevant a number of appendices are attached which detail the methodology of this study, the interview questions, the full literature review and some tentative indicators of social inclusion.

# PLACE: LOCATING RAW



Carmel Rosella was a woman who faced enormous and disabling life experiences, but who also created an active life, including a job and literacy for herself and many others. She received support from an Anglicare organisation that works with women with intellectual disability, Alina, to move into a share house in West End in the early 1990s.

This house was connected with the Waiters Union (2014, p46), a small faith-based community group that supports initiatives that emerge out of the West End community, that foster collaboration, connection and wellbeing. It was at that time that she undertook the project she describes below, supported by a local community development worker. At this time she was also working on developing her own literacy with the help of a friend.

What follows is Carmel's story as she recorded it some years ago, before her untimely death in October 2012.

*"Back in 1993 I wanted to get off disabilities support and find work in community development work. I do not have a degree in community development, just experience in life. At the time, I was living in a community house in West End in Brisbane. The people in the house were involved with people living in hostels and boarding houses in the West End area. I was also involved with people from different churches around West End. I started to talk with some community workers who helped set up a support group for me.*

*I went to speak to the disabilities person at the Department of Social Security to see if they could help me find some community work to do. She told me to go to the Community Rehabilitation Service (CRS) for them to help me to do what I wanted to do. The person I saw there didn't know where to start so she asked me to find my own placement to get experience in community work for three months. So I did with these people from some churches around West End.*

*My role was to find out what people who lived in the hostels and the boarding houses wanted. I talked a bit about my life and they started to trust me. People living in hostels have trouble trusting people, because many have trusted people before and their trust was broken. After a while they started to open up to me and told me they wanted to learn how to read and write.*

*So I took that knowledge back to my support group and they said I could perhaps look for funding for a reading and writing group. I found funding called the Community Literacy Program, which is funded by DETIR (Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations). I told my support group and we started to talk about a reading and writing group. It was suggested that we needed a reference group made up of people with teaching backgrounds. Then we all sat down and talked about how we were going to apply for funding and form a reading and writing group.*

*I think the support group was becoming frustrated with me, because I kept on using my language. They had to change the way they spoke to the way I used language, for example, to use the right jargon. That was in 1995. We also got our first funding in 1995 and we are still being funded for*

*our course now. We had five students the first year, now we have twenty students enrolled. Every year we get more people involved, because the students speak to each other at their pace and learn reading and writing at their own pace.”(Rosella No date)*

Carmel’s first grant was \$2400 in about 1994. It provided “an opportunity for eight people from local hostels to develop their functional reading, writing and counting skills in a half-day per week course over nine weeks”(The Community Initiatives Resources Association c2008, p23). This was followed by no less than five small grants from a variety of sources, but this funding eventually dried up when the government departments responsible for training and education communicated that the program was not having sufficient outcomes in employment or mainstream training (Neil Barringham, personal communication).

In 2005 Carmel went to see the then Minister for Disability Services, Anna Bligh, who steered her towards funding within the disability stream, and eventually she received a small but ongoing grant which has since sustained the program. Because the funding came under disability criteria, it required a registered disability organisation to auspice the program. It was at this time that A Place to Belong became involved.

A Place to Belong is an agency that has its origins in the deep commitment of a number of people both to community and to the welfare and wellbeing of people living on the edges of society, particularly those wounded by mental illness. Its original mission statement was “...to encourage the building of a society where the acknowledgement of our common brokenness and the treasuring of our uniqueness are accepted as being fundamental to each person’s wholeness” (Barringham and Barringham 2002, p3).

*“The focus of our work has been on understanding the process of community inclusion for people who experience mental and emotional trauma. We have based our learnings around the narratives of people living in hospital and in the general community while also drawing from the writing and thinking of others.” (Barringham and Barringham 2002 pp12-13)*

There was no apparent connection between the work of RAW and A Place to Belong. The manager of A Place to Belong, Neil Barringham said that he was initially quite wary of taking on a program that was not close to the service model of A Place to Belong. In essence this is about helping people to connect to their communities of choice, not supporting training and learning groups. But Neil Barringham agreed to do so as long as the program was self-supporting and included money for supervision (personal communication). This began the association that has developed into a model that links literacy with social inclusion aims.

Carmel had a learning disability, and the struggle to gain control over literacy was definitely about the acquisition of the very concrete skills that she describes here, but her own life story demonstrates that acquiring the ability to read and write was as much about learning to live an active life and to be connected to community and learning opportunities. Carmel was able to engage the community at many different levels, including accessing government funding and resources to support and sustain her vision for adult learning in the community. She understood the importance of helping people to learn by getting alongside them as a trusted companion. This approach emphasises relationships and supportive co-responsibility through partnership and collaboration. Her experiences with literacy were transformative – beginning RAW and also extending her vision through various networks. For example, Carmel ran a project she called ‘Easy Words are Better’, where she visited community groups and suggested ways for them to improve their communication with people who are new to reading and writing. Following her hopes and dreams enabled Carmel to be more included in her community by developing her own literacy and having a valued role as a community educator.



This short history of RAW shows that it is a program which came out of a specific local community, developing slowly and organically. It is embedded in A Place to Belong, not so much by planning, as by contingency and evolution. However, as the program has evolved so has the link between the program and its host organisation. A Place to Belong in turn is administered by Anglicare Southern Queensland and is provided executive services such as payroll through the Anglicare systems.

The ethos of A Place to Belong encourages personal links to people's community of choice and reflects a range of practices and theories that are congruent with this perspective. Among these are theories of: social justice; advocacy; respect for diversity; empowerment; inclusion frameworks, holistic philosophies of daily life and the Recovery model of mental health. It works with a small number of people to help them achieve goals of inclusion into the communities of their choice. One program, "Intensive Recovery-Oriented Support", focuses on providing individual, community-based inclusion interventions for people who are experiencing obstacles across a wide range of life domains. At the time of the research there were five people receiving this kind of intensive support.

The second program "Social Inclusion" reaches a larger number of people and is concerned with helping people who are disconnected to community to find or rediscover natural and organic links to the community. It often engages people in the community who are willing to be allies of people. In 2010 A Place to Belong made a conscious choice to control and limit growth of the agency to avoid the dangers of goal displacement that could be a consequence of growing in size and function. RAW has, however, expanded into two locations since its inception.

RAW is currently conducted in two areas, one in West End, an inner city suburb of Brisbane and the other in Mt Gravatt a suburb about 15 kilometres to the south from the CBD. The West End location is an old, big, rambling Queenslander. West End is a suburb with a mixed demography. It has the largest concentration of Greek and indigenous people in Brisbane, with Musgrave Park at its heart, also being of particular significance to Aboriginals. While it is undergoing gentrification due to its attractive cultural diversity and closeness to the city centre and university sites, it continues to house many small communities within it, such as students, hipsters and artists and the Greek community centered on the large Greek Club bordering Musgrave Park. The house the program is located in, which began as a maternity hospital, has been renovated but not comprehensively or professionally. It is owned by a community association which rents out space to a number of community groups and small businesses. A Place to Belong leases four rooms and uses the rest of the space as required. The entrance way leads to a dark corridor with a donated pottery collection. The corridor then opens up into a large meeting room space with various breakout spaces and a kitchen. While the interior of the house needs a new coat of paint, it has a welcoming feel.

The Mt Gravatt location is quite different. It is situated in a modern building, the Mt Gravatt Community Centre, which has a number of learning spaces and meeting rooms. The main learning room is at the back and is a six-metre square space with a central table and benches and computers set around its outside. This space sometimes become quite tight if not crowded, nevertheless the space is bright and open. The initial group sessions occur here, but then one-on-one learning takes place in the other available rooms and outdoors in shady spaces.

Classes at Mt Gravatt during the research observations were occurring on Monday mornings to about 12:30pm. People were either picked up by the teacher or dropped off by family and carers. A number arrived by public transport, but no student had their own car. Classes in West End occurred on Tuesday mornings. Later in this report a day at West End, chosen at random, will be described to give a sense of how the classes play out, but firstly some of the students will be introduced to provide a sense of the diversity of life stories.

# PEOPLE



There is a diversity of students and tutors attending RAW in the Mt Gravatt and in West End location and no specific “type” of person who attends. The only common factor is that they must be able to register with Queensland Disability Services and be eligible for funded services. Some people have intellectual and/or physical disability and have received inadequate educational opportunities so that their literacy had suffered. On the other hand, at the time of observation one was tertiary educated and had worked as a qualified social worker. A number of people stated that they had found their way there, because, with their carers and support workers, they had identified reading and writing as a goal, and their support workers had found RAW. Others appeared to have found RAW almost by accident. Nerissa, for example, stated that she had been watching TV and saw an advertisement for TAFE literacy classes, and thought “*That’s what I need.*” She had then gone out to looking for a service she could access and found RAW, and by extension A Place to Belong who is also providing her support for social inclusion.

Some students come for a while and then leave, some of these will return. Others stay a long time. Of the students interviewed, most had been there over a year. A few had been coming up to four years. The stories below are edited versions of the stories that people have written in RAW in partnership with tutors, or stories that have been distilled through interviews.

## **Grace’s Story** (note: all the actual names of students have been changed unless indicated)

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Grace attends both West End RAW and Mt Gravatt RAW. She has lived in West End for many years, and she knows a lot of local people, places and community groups. Grace is deeply courteous and respectful towards others, greatly valuing mutuality and reciprocity in her relationships. At times, however, communication can be a barrier for Grace and those she is trying to communicate with due to Grace’s mental health experiences. In her daily life Grace deals with formal thought disorder, which means that her thinking and speech can be tangential or fragmented and difficult to follow. Formal thought disorder and the side effects of various medications can also affect Grace’s memory and her ability to focus on tasks. Grace’s way of thinking and her experiences can be very different from other people’s. For example, Grace describe hearing voices and seeing things that other people do not hear or see, which can be disruptive and difficult for Grace and unsettling for people who don’t realise or understand what is happening for Grace. Grace also has some unusual beliefs that are very real to her, but others do not always understand them or appreciate that they are real to Grace.

Grace connected with the Reading and Writing Group after identifying a personal learning goal of wanting to be able to log on to a computer. RAW’s involvement with Grace has provided much insight into how to communicate with someone experiencing formal thought disorder. The workers and volunteers have also gotten to know Grace better, seeing her gifts and skills such as her creativity, her courtesy and her ability to advocate for herself and others. Grace’s involvement with the Reading and Writing Group led to her linking up with A Place to Belong’s Inclusion Team, with the aim of Grace deepening and sustaining her community connections. Grace continues to be involved as a student of the Reading and Writing Group, and RAW is exploring ways of communicating more

effectively with Grace and working with her towards her learning goals. RAW workers have also been pleased to share their experiences of working with Grace with other people in the community, with the aim of sharing ideas about how to communicate with Grace and deepening her community connections. With Grace's guidance, RAW workers have learned that typing or writing things down using single words, simple phrases or brief questions can be a useful way of communicating and keeping focus. Grace finds it useful to have things documented and has said that it helps with her memory. It can also help to change tasks or activities after short periods as this also helps Grace feel less overwhelmed and more focused. Working with Grace has been a valuable opportunity for RAW to creatively explore communication strategies and educate themselves about Grace's lived experience of formal thought disorder.

## Gabriel's story

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### **Nobody Owns People** **By Gabriel**

Nobody owns people.  
Some people have got to be reminded.  
You can't own a person.  
We are free.  
We're free as birds,  
just no wings  
and no feathers.  
There's nothing stopping us from  
walking. Not a thing.  
That's why we've got legs.  
We've got to walk  
somewhere.  
I walk anywhere.  
I hope  
I make it home.

Gabriel attends the West End group. He lives on the north side of Brisbane and takes two trains to get to West End. Sometimes this means that he arrives late because he has to wait for nurses to provide him medication in the morning. Gabriel lives in a supported accommodation group home. He has been attending RAW for two and a half years. He doesn't like his accommodation. It's like a prison in your own home, he says. "*The gates are always locked, you've got to ask somebody to open them and then wait for them.*" Although he is not physically confined, he feels confined by this process. He also wants to keep a pet bird and do his own cooking and shopping. Gabriel has some serious health conditions and has trouble understanding how to care for those conditions. Because of this his support workers in the group home have indicated that they do not believe he would be able to live independently. However, it remains his consistently repeated desire. He is now also working with Damian Le Goullon to write a letter to his group home expressing both his desire to be supported to live independently and while still in the home to demonstrate that he is able to care for a pet bird.



## Laura's story

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Laura is a student at Mr Gravatt. She is a teenager who has cerebral palsy and is not able to speak very clearly. She gets around in an electric wheelchair that she drives herself. When she first came to RAW at Mt Gravatt she was using a picture book with symbols to communicate, which was a bit clumsy. Given her youth, Damian thought that Laura, like other young people, might respond better to technology and advised Laura's father to buy an iPad. Laura quickly responded and started finding Apps which she has purchased and downloaded to help her communicate, including a symbol and speech program. She is a painter and has found painting programs on the iPad preferable to using physical paint, as she dislikes the tactile sensation of paint.

After a while Damian was invited to a play in which Laura had a role. Her ability to act was apparent, and now Damian is helping her extend her range of physical expression. In addition, he and her tutors realised that Laura was learning phonically and that she was trying to sound out words, which suggested the potential usefulness of a Speech and Language Pathologist. In view of her age it is not unlikely that Laura is interested in connecting with other people her own age without disability, and that may be the next stage in helping her move from disability-specific services to community-based ones. Damian has suggested that Laura could certainly get a job in the future when she starts to show interest in one. At this time she is learning to build her confidence by teaching her tutors how to communicate with her and in the future an employment avenue might be to teach people facilitated communication. Of course, these are other people's ideas at this point and Laura refuses to be rushed!

## Bill 's story (his real name)

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Bill understands the importance of literacy, reflected in his desire to be able to read newspapers and books. As a child however, Bill was considered 'unteachable' and was sent out of class to go and watch the trains. Interestingly, Bill has managed to acquire an impressive body of historical knowledge about trains as a result of his early childhood experiences. Now aged in his late sixties, Bill has worked with RAW to translate his knowledge into stories about trains and trams. Bill has also compiled a comprehensive list of personal aspirations, and has identified reading and writing as priority areas. Despite being excluded from mainstream education opportunities as a child, Bill found a way to adapt – by teaching himself to identify letters and words using word search puzzles. Bill loves word puzzles and constantly carries puzzle books around with him. Although he may struggle to understand phonics or sounds at times, word search puzzles have enabled him to identify and recognise letters and even whole words. RAW has been working with Bill to develop his phonic awareness and have also been pleased to discover that Bill's interest and knowledge around trains and trams has revealed him to be a gifted storyteller.

## Alvin's story

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"Free coffee" and "Meet good people" – when asked why he comes to Reading and Writing Group, these are Alvin's top priorities. This certainly reflects things Alvin's values in life, being an extremely social and engaging bloke well known to many in his community, but if you dig a little deeper it is clear Alvin is committed to improving his literacy skills. Alvin loves to talk with people – whether it is talking to the bus driver, playing practical jokes on friends at Community meal (see glossary), or chatting to his friends and making coffees at the Drug Arm van (see glossary). This is definitely one of his strengths, but also a priority area Alvin has wanted to work on. Alvin's speech could be described as 'dyspraxic', meaning that things he says regularly (like "hello grandma" or "you're the best worker") are very clear, whereas if Alvin wants to communicate something novel he may

experience difficulty with forming the words clearly. His cheerful smile is a familiar sight on many bus routes around town; if you need any advice about which bus to catch Alvin would not hesitate to help you out. Alvin has a keen interest in buses, knows a lot about local routes that are familiar to him and loves exploring town and discovering new routes. Alvin uses public transport to ensure that he arrives on time for attending RAW, to get to his job at a Salvation Army Store, to visit his favourite places in the community and to catch up with people. Using hand signals, body movements and role-play has significantly helped to guide and prompt Alvin's speech. This has been a useful way of encouraging Alvin to speak in sentences and participate more fully in communicating with others. By adopting a range of strategies based on Alvin's strengths and interests, his speech continues to improve. Alvin has enthusiastically performed role-plays and mime for the RAW group. RAW are now looking at extending Alvin's interests, especially in the performing arts, so that he can share his interests and gifts more broadly in the community.

## Deanna's story

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Deanna is a student in West End. She is a highly trained and qualified person. She has worked as a social worker in prisons, and has also been a teacher (*"Those magic jobs I did in my twenties...I was passionate about juvenile justice."*). She is very organised (for example, her phone reminded her during the interview with the researcher that her parents were going overseas in a month!).

Deanna has had severe depression. At times she has extreme trouble sleeping and can go for many days without sleep. The effects of this are cumulative and make it very difficult for her to cope, catapulting her into crisis. She described her mind as talking to her constantly, as "churning". She wants to sometimes shut it down. "If I presented like (someone with intellectual disability and communication barriers) people would know my needs." When her skills are reflected back to her, her comment was "What you see, I see as nothing."

She uses the "computer group" specifically to help with aspects of her care. She is scared of technology. She thinks that one of her problems is that she is even too literate, that is easily bored by low-level work. Her network is extensive and well-organised and she does not need A Place to Belong as a primary support. She uses a disability employment counsellor who is helping her goal-setting, while at the same time she admits that she does not know what she wants to do or is ready to do. She does not want to go back to places where she felt bad, like being a teacher, but she recognises that volunteer work could help her work out where her place is now.

She thought her need for A Place to Belong had been satisfied (learning computer skills) until she realised that there were other things which she could learn (such as using social media programs such as Facebook). She wrote down her aims as *"I would like to feel more confident about technology."* However, further discussion revealed a more essential goal of wanting to work 10-15 hours per week.

## Tristan's story (his real name)

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Tristan is an ex-student of West End RAW. Despite acquiring a brain injury in his youth, Tristan had a clear vision of wanting to be able to read to his son and to study at TAFE. His motivation gave him the courage to start classes with us and he shares his story below:

### "The Accident" by Tristan

This is the story of an incredible, courageous man who had his life crushed and smashed but was able to repair himself. Tristan had a BMX accident when he was young due to faulty

brakes. In his mind, he often returns to the workshop before the accident. If only I had fixed those brakes correctly. Tristan may not be able to fix that bike but he has learned to repair his damaged mind.

The main reason to look for this group was my family. I wanted to read books to my son. Another reason was to go to TAFE to learn more in the future. The first day I came to the Reading and Writing Group I was nervous and didn't talk too much, but I felt confident with my learning. Now I can read books to my son, I have learned how to read and write, I am improving in TAFE and my family is very happy with that. Starting a new class can be hard. I felt nervous and didn't talk much. I started learning how to read using word lists, and it was easy and fast for me. In one year I was able to read all the Reading Link books.

A year ago I started attending TAFE classes because I wanted to keep improving my reading skills. The first day I was nervous and scared but it was okay. Teachers there make learning easy and I have a nice relationship with my 16 classmates. Actually, I have had three girlfriends in this time. Now I have a month off, and after that I will go back to finish Level 2 and start Level 3.

For me learning is challenging, some things like spelling are easy, but some words are difficult. When I first started I was happy because I was in TAFE, and I was excited to learn. The first couple of days I was nervous but now I am relaxed and I feel good. I can read to my son and I trust my capacity to learn. When you start learning you can feel bad sometimes but most of the time there are good feelings. I would recommend to other people who want to learn reading and writing to try it.

### **Eagle's story** (his choice of name)

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Eagle has experienced a combination of mental health issues and social disability caused through detention in juvenile facilities. He says of himself, "If you want to know about me, it's all about juve." He has significant problems getting around caused by his weight, and as result has been isolated in the community. His first experience of RAW in Mt Gravatt led him to say that he felt it was a turning point.

During one early session, Damian asked Eagle what he would like to do and he expressed that he would like to write a book and asked if Damian could help him with it. That book has been the focus of his learning. Eagle says that he believes he is dyslexic and has always struggled with the jumble of words, so he and his tutor would take turns writing the story, line by line as he dictated. Now a skeleton structure has been written, and he is getting volunteer support outside of RAW to develop it further into a publishable novella. He is also working with another RAW student who is interested in animation, to turn it into a cartoon. His tutor was also a music therapist and together they wrote a ballad that illustrates the story. Eagle has gone on to sing this ballad in a public gathering and also talk about his experience of learning at an Anglicare national conference in 2013.





# PRACTICE



This section aims to provide guidance to people interested in setting up literacy groups with a social inclusion focus. It may also be of interest to professionals in the field who are interested in the links between literacy and social inclusion, and in the practice of other learning groups.

It is in two parts: The first part, Practice observed, reflects the observations that were conducted by the researchers. It looks at the story of one day of learning, chosen at random, with its successes and challenges; describes the mechanics of how people join RAW and leave it (are ‘faded’ or ‘exited’) as they achieve their social inclusion goals and discusses some of the major themes and issues that emerge from observation.

The second part, Practice frameworks, is designed to provide some scaffolding for the building of such a program and provides some information about frameworks that are useful, including the pedagogy of RAW itself.

## Part One: Practice observed

### A description of a typical Reading and Writing Group (RAW) class in West End

This mid-July morning is cold by Brisbane standards and there is a slow start to the 9:00am session with people drifting in and out. The class starts with three students and three tutors, two of whom are students on placement. Damian, the teacher, begins a warm-up exercise which is clapping hands together. The first person claps in a certain pattern and the next person has to repeat that and add their own pattern, and so on. It is a memory exercise that he describes as being about working as a large group. He follows this up with an exercise in pairs which he demonstrates using Bill; one person makes a motion and the other has to mirror them as they do it. The first try is a bit awkward as Bill is clearly embarrassed, but Alvin gets the class going with the exercise. It takes only a few minutes and then Damian debriefs the exercise. He explains that the origin of reading and writing is copying. There is a high level of attention from the class at this stage. He makes a comment that some people require prompting to copy correctly.

At this point John arrives. He is an ex-student who continues to turn up each week. Today he is dressed as a punk, and stamps his feet to get attention. He is a big man and it is hard to ignore him but Damian continues. He tells students and tutors that in this period of learning (this is the second week of the four week class cycle) we should expect to see an improvement even if we cannot expect to be able to read. He goes around the class setting tasks but tells the tutors that they are free to change the goals and tasks as they see fit. Before breaking up into learning teams of tutor and student they play another game, which is a simple game of ‘What season do you like?’ John comes in again and starts dancing and saying that he likes the boy group One Direction. This gets a chuckle from some of the other students. Damian and other members of the class continue with the exercise.

The paired-up students and tutors find spaces to work, some in the breakout rooms of the rambling Queenslander, others outside to work in the sunshine at tables dotted around the front yard. One learning pair is set an assisted reading task around bodybuilding including different types of lifts. The student, Marty, is quite well-built and is keen on bodybuilding, which is why this reading topic is chosen. Another two tutors are assigned to Bill to do spelling and assisted reading and maybe later some maths. Alvin is working in the computer room with a tutor, firstly printing out pictures of people doing things. While this allocation of lessons is going on John keeps dancing through the class and talking to himself. Gabriel arrives at this stage, having come from the north side of Brisbane by train. He is sometimes delayed by the nurses who give him his injections for his diabetes. John's support worker from A Place to Belong turns up also and Damian suggests to him that he takes the ex-student into another room to do some drawing.

Gabriel begins a spontaneous conversation with Damian, as the other students are going off to their groups. *"What makes a great house?" he asks and then answers himself: "Where people don't treat you like you are handicapped, where you can do what you want. Any house should allow you to make choices."*

Damian gives the tutor a new word "residential" to teach to Gabriel. His learning team consists of his tutor and a volunteer who acts as Gabriel's ally to help him do various things in the community, such as use public transport. They retire outside under the tree. The tutor starts explaining the word 'residential' and Gabriel shows her his Transport card.

At this point the ally interrupts and uses some negative labelling language, for example calling Gabriel *"handicapped"* and saying that it would be impossible for A Place to Belong to find non-handicapped or normal people to live with the student. The ally starts unhelpfully lecturing the student telling him he has to get better at adding up and learning to tell the time, otherwise *"you will get ripped off"*. He suggests that maybe reading and writing is not important, but that he needs to know how to count and know the days so that he can take medication. He clearly has Gabriel's wellbeing in mind and is well-intentioned, but his approach is antithetical to the philosophy and practice of RAW, and it is evident by the way that Gabriel responds to him, or rather, does not respond, that this is not helping.

The tutor intervenes in this rather negative conversation, and cuts through the negativity to volunteer to work with Gabriel on a project to move him from his supported group accommodation that he has been expressing he does not like (see Gabriel's story, p14). At this point, when things had got a little tense, Damian visited the group and intervened to reframe the conversation positively. He commented that they had previously explored this path with the student, looking for alternative independent accommodation. At that time, Gabriel had chosen to stay in his residential setting, but if he was still expressing a desire to move then perhaps it indicated another level of discontent, not necessarily that he wants a house. In any case the issue needs to be acknowledged and explored again. The exchange raised all sorts of issues about autonomy, the connection between literacy and rights and about the need to attend to welfare and literacy issues in conjunction.

Damian then suggests to Gabriel that with the tutor's help he could write a book about what he does not like in his current residential accommodation. *"I don't like bars," he says, "I'm a prisoner in my own home."* *"I don't like living with handicapped people."* He says that he has bad memories of being picked on when he was young. Damian suggests that the team works on fading that memory.

Gabriel says, *"They baby you. Treat you like you're handicapped. I want to do my own washing. Shopping. Don't talk to me like a baby."* Damian then explains why he is suggesting that Gabriel write

a book – it will help him stand up for his rights by expressing his needs clearly and demonstrating that he knows what he is talking about to the accommodation support workers who right now are not listening to him.

The ally interrupts to say that the residential accommodation has three shifts of workers, as if to imply that Gabriel can always find someone to open the doors, and maybe implying that he is being a bit unreasonable. “Let’s listen to the student and travel in his shoes.” says Damian. *“I don’t know if I can change the situation, but I know that I would feel like a prisoner if I couldn’t open my door.”*

Damian asks Gabriel, *“How are you shown ‘respect’? If I gave you a key?”*

Gabriel replies, *“Do you own shopping. Pay your own bills.”*

*“Can I just give you one word – ‘Dignity’,”* says Damian, and he gives tutor and the ally a task, to determine a list of things for the student to do himself, and list of words to describe a good place. *“You’re more interested in ‘doing’ words than ‘place’ words.”* The student agrees, *“Pay your rent and bills, do your own shopping, do your own cooking. Washing clothes. Keeping place clean and tidy, pay gas and electricity.”* At this point the ally appears to be coming round to the task and says: *“He’ll have to buy his own clothes and if he goes into a flat he’ll need a fridge and bedclothes. He’ll need to be near transportation”.* *“Done before”*, Gabriel simply comments.

In another learning group inside the house Damian and Alvin are doing some role-plays, firstly about a ticket inspector telling a passenger to get their feet off the seat. Alvin plays the inspector and has to tell Damian, the passenger, to get his feet off the seat. Alvin then suggested a second activity, where he plays a drunken person being approached by a policeman. The policeman asks the drunk person for their address, but the drunken person isn’t able to say it.

Once Damian and Alvin are out of the role-play they talk about the need for him to have his address handy and to be able to say what it is. So he tries singing his address, which makes it easier. Both role-plays have relevance for the real world, as the first one was used to reflect on a time when the student didn’t have a train ticket and got in trouble for this. The other objective is for the student to practice forming whole sentences. Alvin clearly enjoys role-play. He is very animated and plays his part convincingly. After the role-play Alvin and Damian go to make Alvin a laminated ID card on the computer, with his address that he can keep in his wallet.

After the morning tea break, the learning pairs come back together into one group and there is an interesting exchange between Bill and Damian, as Damien asks Bill what his goals are and what he would like to do. Bill says that he will do what he is instructed to do, as Damien is the teacher. Damien responds with a smile and reaffirms the importance of adult learning and Bill being able to set his own goals by saying *“It’s up to you, what do you want to learn?”* The student says he is happy with the way the group runs and that he enjoys the social contact.

Marty, who is planning his reading around bodybuilding tells the group he would like to do some gym work. Gabriel reiterated his morning motto to the group *“Nobody owns anyone”*. Damian responds by saying, *“That’s right, “nobody owns anyone””*. Damian goes around the room and the tutors and students work out what it is they are going to focus on after the morning tea break. Then everyone comes together to share morning tea and conversation around a large dining table off the kitchen of the house. After morning tea, students and tutors all come together and the learning is debriefed. Bill is asked to develop and tell his story; Gabriel will create a book with his goals and likes and dislikes about accommodation in it, which can be used to communicate with other agencies; Marty has some specific literacy needs around multi-syllables, but it can be oriented around the topic of bodybuilding.

After the lessons finish and the students have been picked up by their carers or parents or made their own way home, Damian has a tutor debrief. Damian is honest and reflexive. He acknowledges that today was sometimes difficult in terms of the fit between the exercises and the student interests and abilities. He says: *“We need to investigate new ways of working. Some tools work, others don’t.”* *“Sometimes the adult learners teach us how to teach”*. *“This is a school giving people the skills to work their goals out for themselves. We are giving the words for people to work out their problems.”*

Damian also debriefs the ally in relation to the incident earlier where he had negatively framed Gabriel’s options. His approach is respectful but clear: *“When working from a strengths-based perspective, the message needs to be about what you can do, so for example, in the case of Gabriel, how much can he cook, not how little can he do for himself”*. Damian addressed the ally’s approach in a public space, but respectfully so that it becomes a learning experience for everyone. He reiterates that negative framing is damaging to students and tutors. Confrontation has to be in the form of questions because that opens up learning, such as *“I am concerned for you, rather than you can’t do this”*. Having made this critique he respectfully acknowledges that the ally is providing a bridge to the many concerns that need to be addressed to keep the student safe in independent living. He observes that *“His desire to find a house gets in the way of his learning, so this needs to be addressed”*.

It appears that tutor development happens publicly, so that others can learn at the same time. Although critiquing a person’s work is a sensitive topic, Damian seems to manage this well, and the ally is not obviously upset. Some of the tutors express that they are exhausted and everyone adjourns for the day, filtering out into the narrow streets of West End. The session went from 9:00am to 1:00pm.

This description paints a picture of how the day is structured, the mix of group work and one-on-one learning activities. It demonstrates that some of the learning is planned activity, but also opportunities arise organically, such as Gabriel’s unhappiness with his accommodation that allows for spontaneous response and the development of a new meaningful direction for the student. There is also informal time over coffee and cake. Though the learning environment is relaxed it is also clear that a lot of thought goes into each lesson and a great deal of emphasis is placed on finding out what the learning goals of each student is, what their interests are and building up a relationship of trust and connection.

In the next section of Part One, Practice observed, we look more closely at the mechanics of RAW and some of the issues and themes that arise. Some of these issues and themes are pedagogical, others are to do with the issues that arise as we experience our lives. There are four aspects we want to focus on: the progress of the student through RAW, class structure and interactions, roles and responsibilities in RAW and pedagogical principles in action.





# ISSUES AND THEMES

## The progress of the student through RAW



As the stories of students and the story of a day at RAW demonstrate there are a diversity of people and situations that are encountered. The commitment of this community-based learning group is to adjust to and reflect the students' needs, rather than to take them through a set curriculum. This does not mean, however, that there is no pedagogy or curriculum to follow. As the RAW pedagogy outlined below demonstrates, Damian uses conventional frameworks of literacy to teach functional skills. Where there appears to be innovation, however, is in the creative use of literacies that are already meaningful to students (teaching from what is already known) to assist the learning. These are drawn from both practical experience and the theory of multiliteracies and situated learning also discussed below. Some examples observed were:

- teaching Alvin speech skills through singing and through role play;
- using a computer to help Grace structure and express her thoughts;
- teaching Eagle spelling and grammar skills through writing his novella and through writing a ballad;
- teaching Gabriel multisyllabic words and concepts in connection to accommodation; and
- structuring Bill's acquisition of vocabulary through his love of word puzzles.

There is an additional dimension where one can see the interaction of literacy with social inclusion. So, for example:

- Alvin is taught skills to deal with situations in the community which have previously caused him and others grief, such as how to deal with authority;
- Grace was able with help to write her case and access government funding to help her achieve her goals of wellbeing and sustainability;
- Eagle sang his ballad at a community gathering, having an impact on his confidence, and also presented RAW at an Anglicare national conference; and
- Gabriel was assisted to acquire the skills to advocate for himself with his support workers.

When a student joins, they are given a period of time to become comfortable in the environment before they are taken through the inevitable paperwork required to enroll them. This is perhaps not strictly consistent with accepted procedure, but Damian expressed that he wants students to have a positive learning experience as consistently as possible and is wary of forcing people who already experience a great deal of management by services through more bureaucracy. As later excerpts from students will show, the rigidity of a mainstream learning experience, for example TAFE, does not suit many people who are experiencing mental health issues and other obstacles to learning.

The previous stories also demonstrate that there are a variety of pathways that lead to RAW, some intentional and some that appear to be almost accidental. When they first arrive people's expression of their reasons for being there are taken at face value, with an understanding that identifying learning goals may be an evolving process. Because needs change or are revealed as the student gains in experience in managing their own learning, and gains confidence in expressing those needs, RAW has found that constant evaluation and assessment is useful. In a small number of cases, for example

Deanna's, who already has advanced literacy and who wanted to gain confidence in dealing with technology, the goals can be specified. But even here, as she expressed, she discovered that having learnt a number of skills, new things that she needed to learn became apparent.

One of the tensions, therefore, that Damian identified, is finding the point where a student is ready to graduate. The practice philosophy is to move them on to bigger and better things, including mainstream education, as soon as they are ready. The issue however is how to do that. In RAW the practice is evolving that people may be referred to the inclusion arm of A Place to Belong. So John, the ex-student, was connected to an inclusion worker when it was realised that pursuing literacy was actually holding him back. Tristan achieved his goals after a number of years and was able to progress to TAFE on his own initiative. Deanna returns when she needs help with something specific. Nerissa is a graduate and with the help of the inclusion arm is now studying for a degree in natural health. The person's learning program is therefore negotiated and tailored to their evolving needs. One of the tools that Damian uses is the Core Skills Framework with its functional gradation of skill levels, however he has found that assessing the achievement of social inclusion goals is a more difficult matter, and he asked the researchers to help him develop such a tool. An assessment framework that attempts to do this is included at Appendix 3.

The connection between literacy and social connectedness, social inclusion or social capital, to use a variety of formulae which are broadly in the same domain, but which are favoured by different individuals, is one of the most interesting findings of this research. As was described in the introduction, the association of RAW and A Place to Belong was not sought out, and came about only because Carmel Rosella needed to find a trusted community organisation that would auspice the money she was raising. Nevertheless it appears to be fortuitous. Looking at literacy through the lens of social inclusion, or social inclusion through the lens of literacy opens up a creative space of multiple connections and possibilities.

## **Class structure and interactions**

The classes in West End and at Mt Gravatt have a varying number of students but usually an average of five or six. In all lessons observed there were enough tutors to ensure at least one-to-one sessions were possible. Lessons at both sites are structured around group and one-on-one activities as the sample lesson demonstrates, but the structure and interactions can be frequently disrupted. The classroom in West End sits off an open corridor and as the house is used by a number of groups in the community and some small businesses, people are always coming by. The Mt Gravatt site does not have this problem but nevertheless students and sometimes even tutors arrive late. In the lesson described above John came into class after it had begun, with his own agenda. The disruption is absorbed by Damian who may change strategy opportunistically or to acknowledge the person who is disruptive. Despite the apparent disruption, however, tutors and students appear to accept this as the environment, and it does not appear to cause a loss of focus.

The openness and freedom of movements of the West End site also presents some advantages. Volunteers come who have a genuine interest in issues of community development, rather than from a charitable motivation. They might come to the community house from curiosity or a general desire to get involved and then end up as tutors in RAW. This means that some volunteers very quickly grasp the ethos of empowerment and the connection of literacy to social inclusion. To take advantage of some of these connections Damian has to be opportunistic. Because the program allows people to come in at any time during the learning cycle, it puts their readiness ahead of the demands of a curriculum. Damian described this as a triumph of "agency over structure", but it also reflects an appreciation that you need to work with someone when they come forward to seek an engagement, rather than sending them away and telling them they have to come back in a month.

## The structure of the lesson

Despite the flexibility that allows people to join at any time, each lesson and each course cycle has a structure, and also fits into a pedagogical cycle, which supports the tutors. The structure, is in part ritualistic. It begins at 9:00am with a warm up that on occasions are used by Damian to help teach some skills and also to warm people up to working together and for themselves; it serves to get people into the right frame of mind for learning, as Nerissa expressed. For the period of observations this was followed by a practice of reviewing the goals and progress of students one by one.

The first session is focussed on the achievement of specific literacy skills, for example multisyllables or phonic awareness. It last for about three quarters of an hour. Nerissa was one student who expressed that she found this frustrating because she would feel that she was only just beginning when it came time for morning tea, however in general students did not express any issue with the shortness of this session.

The second lesson, after the morning tea break, is less intensive, and reflects other aims of the student, for example Bill to tell the story of trams in Brisbane, or Gabriel to develop a letter to his accommodation providers expressing his desire for independent housing. Laura, who uses an electronic spelling and speaking board, pursued painting after reading, and Damian, who is also a professional painter was able to give her lessons in colour and introduce her to Apps on the iPad around painting.

After this one-on-one session everyone comes together again as a group, including tutors, and once more Damian goes around the circle to check what people have done during the morning and what they feel they have learnt. He said that this provides him with opportunities to affirm tutors and students and to provide closure. The session over, students leave and Damian spends more time with the tutors who can stay, reviewing the morning. This is when tutors will express problems and frustrations or get some technical help. On one occasion, for example, the tutor discussed the technical issues around helping a student who was able to recognise common multisyllabic words such as “supermarket”, while at the same time getting tripped up on “ST” as in Store.

## The structure of the semester

Each semester of learning is made up of two cycles of four weeks or eight weeks of learning. The first week is spent acclimatising the student. This is when Damian will try to understand the needs of the student. They begin to work with a tutor. If possible the student stays with the same tutor through successive weeks. On the second week it was clear that many students are still establishing goals, and in fact evaluation and planning takes up to 50% of class time.

*“Each four week review allows us to go deeper – we may connect beyond the presenting goal to the underlying need. However this cannot be forced. If you do then it becomes a counselling role, and moving into this space would create unsafety.” (Damian personal communication)*

For a new student, the first lesson of the semester may be about assessing their literacy level and about establishing some initial goals. For an established student it will be about reviewing those goals but also pursuing learning. An assessment is made as early as the second week, allowing some refinement and re-targetting. Another assessment is then made at the end of the fourth week.

# ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN RAW



It has already been noted that one of the successful elements of the RAW program is flexibility in terms of tasks and roles. However, in the interest of clarity it is worth giving some more detail on how the different roles are currently defined in the program based on the observations and interviews.

## The teacher

The teacher is the key facilitator, organiser and support person for students and volunteer tutors. As the current teacher in RAW, Damian described the real inspiration for himself in developing this course as Carmel Rosella.

*“Carmel’s honesty and openness to learning made my role as a person wanting to assist easier. I didn’t need to be an expert on mild intellectual disability; I had one in front of me. I could also be upfront about my own spelling struggles and this was often a welcome commonality and invitation to co-discovery. She practically embodied the quality of being able to dream and then activate that dream. She used to say that you could set a lot of goals to get to microskills, but what you really needed to find your goal was the ability to dream. However, this was not an idealistic and vague notion.” (Damian)*

The role of the teacher can help a goal to materialise. Not only through encouragement but also through testing and showing people that they have actually gained skills and can refine their goals. Not everyone in the field of adult literacy encourages testing, but Damian believes it has the function of building confidence when done properly. This involves inviting the person, *“Would you like to test this out?”*. Lessons can be challenging. Energy levels vary from class to class and some students lack the persistence that he feels is essential to make progress. Acquiring this persistence is one of the micro-skills needed for learning.

Damian moves around groups during the lesson time looking at issues, providing advice to tutors and students and changing goals when something is not working. He always has something helpful to say and is a constant presence. He appears to have the empathy and knowledge that allows him to spot subtle and nuanced obstacles to learning. He says that over the years he has discovered knowledge of how specific disabilities may work, which gives him clues as to how to overcome those obstacles.

The teacher needs to be able to diagnose linguistic and literacy needs, however, in the first instance there is a deliberate strategy of not rushing to diagnose. Bill, who is in his late fifties, presented initially with a general desire as *“wanting to learn to read and write.”* His learning was around basic phonics, and he displayed an uneven ability to take them on board, but as he became comfortable Bill began to tell some very interesting tales, which suggested to Damian a way forward. For example, in school he did not receive any support for his learning, and the teachers were clearly either uninterested or unable to provide him any. His teacher used to send him out of the class to go



and look at the trains which, as was noted in his story above, have been an abiding interest. Writing about trains and history became a way to engage with meaningful themes for Bill.

The teacher has to work hard at engagement. Although students are usually motivated to learn something, the fact that they are at different levels means that it is easy for them to lose interest. If the attention is not on some students, it seems as though they feel that time is being wasted. Damian works on strategies of engagement: games and exercises, frequent breaks in routine, finding out the needs that are really motivating, for example as noted above, Bill writing a book about trains, or another student reading an article about bodybuilding.

A critical skill of the teacher is to be able to overcome the student's anxiety. Damian works with tutors to teach these skills. One strategy observed was setting oneself a specific time to think through a problem; instead of talking through problems at the beginning of the class, wait until the end and focus on them. Focussing on learning in itself is calming.

In another session a student came late to the introductory class in a state of high anxiety, obvious from her expression and demeanour. Damian very quickly directed his teaching assistant, who has social work training, to take her out and give her support. He thought this action was necessary because the person could easily communicate her distress and perhaps affect the other students, but also because as she had clearly come to the class for help in her present crisis he wanted to demonstrate that RAW could be there for her when she needed it. Later in debriefing this episode he affirmed that this was a high priority strategy, based on her personal need, but also because he has to look after the dynamics of the whole group, not to force her to sit along with the class, which may have exacerbated how she was feeling. The real learning for her was not her literacy needs, but how to deal with her anxiety, however, this could not be the direct learning goal. In fact, what is generally needed is to isolate and identify the microskills that will be helpful to learning. In this case it was expanding her capacity to deal with her anxiety around technology, which connected directly with her desire to get back into the workforce.

It helps that Damian has skills as a qualified teacher but is also an accomplished musician (choir master), artist and activist. He has many years of experience working with homeless young people and people with disabilities. As a result he brings multiliteracies from his own life to bear in the classroom.

## **Tutors**

Volunteer tutors are indispensable to the RAW model. Due to A Place to Belong's readiness to take tertiary students who are studying social work or community development subjects on placement, two to four of the tutors at any one time may be students who will be there for periods of six to nine months. The disadvantage is that some (by no means all) of these students have little or no experience in training or teaching, and clearly need more support. The advantage however is that, while it is unusual for students to continue to volunteer after their placements, they are committed consistently over their period of placement. During the period of the observations two tutors were social work masters students on placement from Thailand and Vietnam and two were from Brisbane. Another was a music therapy student.

Other tutors are volunteers from the local community. During observations, three were volunteers from the community and two were paid staff. There is considerable diversity in the tutors, which means that some bring remarkable gifts. One tutor, for example, is a music therapist and an accomplished musician and was able to provide Eagle with stimulating creative help in the development of his novel, particularly with the writing of a ballad and helping him to sing and

record it. Others are mature and bring a range of life experiences and skills. Another recent volunteer who is now working with a woman isolated in a mental health facility spent her youth teaching indigenous children in the far North of Australia.

All the tutors are motivated by different reasons as the following quotes illustrate:

*“For me it’s witnessing someone’s story. So - and it may be the first time they’d ever told their story. So I feel quite privileged just to sit with people and just communicate in whichever way is easy for them to communicate.”*

*“For me it’s experience. So I’ve just finished a psychology degree and I don’t have any experience and I want to work within this area of mental health and to work with adults with learning difficulties and intellectual disabilities. It’s learning how to work with them and - because it’s different to working with children. I’ve done a little bit of that but I haven’t really got any experience. This was - it’s a good opportunity to help out, and it’s volunteering, so it’s a good way to spend my free time basically.”*

*“I think it’s rewarding because it’s really important to not just help people that need help, but also to know who’s in your community and might have these issues, and they’re people you wouldn’t meet otherwise, unless you went out to seek to help them. So it’s breaking down your normal social circle and meeting other people, but on top of that being able to, yeah, help them in some way by just understanding them and - trying to understand them and see where you can help them.*

*I think people wouldn’t realise that this is how they connect with other people. They’re - they just look at it as volunteering but really you could - your neighbour could have a mental health problem and you could go over there and sit down and read with them, or - so, yeah, I think it’s breaking down that stereotypical social circles for people is really good.”*

– Tutors commenting on their motivations for volunteering in RAW

There are clear challenges to being a tutor. The risk faced is that without sufficient preparation a poorly equipped tutor may not only not help but may do damage to the student. The description of the typical class has an example of how a person, in this case an ally rather than a tutor, can potentially do harm by using inappropriate language (calling a person “handicapped”). In this case the resilience and strength of the student was evident. He ignored the restrictions being put on him and continued implacably transmitting his message and desires. While negative labelling is antithetical to the policy and practice of both RAW and A Place to Belong, the ally was doing this based on his genuine concern for the health and wellbeing of the person, and Damian chose on this occasion to use it as an opportunity to educate him in a strengths-based approach. Nevertheless it reinforces the need identified above for a robust preparation for the tutor.

Tutors need to be flexible. People come to sessions sometimes unable to learn or do what is planned because of their mental state. Damian encourages the tutor to vary the lesson plan but this assumes that tutors feel confident to do so. However, interruptions can be used creatively. When Grace comes to class she has a learning plan, but the tutor reports that invariably the plan deviates because Grace’s thoughts relate to her issues and her desire for connection in the community. On one occasion the entire session on the computer became a recovery of a past life when she lived on the Mornington Peninsula in Victoria. Because her disability revolves around thought-disorder she finds the more structured part of the lesson helpful.

Sometimes, also, the learning relationship is reversed, which requires great flexibility and a sense of mutuality in the learning partnership. It is the students who can teach the tutors. Two of the RAW students, for example, know more than the tutors about computers and computer programs. And all students can teach the tutors how they learn.

One tutor spoke of her eureka moment that transformed her relationship with the work:

*"I just had this moment of, like, I know who the expert is now (i.e. the student). It sounds really obvious in hindsight but it just transformed my whole experience. It helped me let go of a lot of that fear and just - I know now that I - when I'm starting to feel that I don't know what to do, I don't know if we're meeting the learning goals, I don't know what I'm doing, I don't know if I'm doing it right, it's like, it's okay. The person's still here, they're engaging."*

Tutors identified patience and understanding as key characteristics for them to cultivate.

*"...If they have a mental problem or an issue there, you could see them the next week and things you feel like you've really made headway with, can go right back. It - it's not disheartening, it's more understanding. It takes a while to get to know someone if you're only seeing them once a week for three hours, so - but yeah, that's something I think you've got to watch, not to patronise them."*

It is also clear that sometimes tutors feel pressure and the need to perform. They may have unreasonable expectations of themselves given their lack of training, and they need to be managed through this, as the following excerpt from the group interview with tutors reveals:

- "Tutor1: ...you want a plan and a program and even as a tutor you think oh I need X Y Z practical skills and knowledge to facilitate this learning. I think more importantly than that - that stuff comes, you've got to - it does come from actually getting to connect with the person...
- Tutor2: Yeah.
- Tutor1: ...and to know them and to listen to them, and to not step in and do things for them and have your - it's not your goal or your vision...
- Tutor2: Yeah.
- Tutor1: ...it's theirs. You're getting alongside them to look together. Like you said, you're in it for the journey and for the ride. So to really be prepared to just get alongside someone and stay there. Not to - you're side by side, you're not...
- Tutor2: It's not that power struggle.
- Tutor1: Yeah, you're not in...
- Tutor2: It's not a power - it's not a control thing...
- Tutor1: Yeah.
- Tutor2: ...it's - I think if there's too many skills and things introduced, then there - it becomes this power thing...
- Tutor1: Yeah.
- Tutor2: ...where there's someone up here looking down on this person learning here..."
- (from group tutor conversation)

Sometimes Damian has to manage students through the bad patches. For example, on one day one of the tutors felt bad because the student she was working with, Bill, had seemed to go backwards. "There were a lot of things he didn't do today that he could do last week". She reported that he seemed to be having problems telling a 'k' from a 't', and that he did not seem to be listening, which made her think that perhaps he is hard of hearing. At first, in debriefing the session Damian reassured her

that because Bill has a mild intellectual disability, he may have difficulty recognising sounds, and suggested that perhaps a referral to a Speech and Language Therapist would be helpful. He tried to direct her attention to the successes that she had had. They then worked on possible strategies and Damian reassured the tutor that it was alright to change a strategy if the one you were on was not working.

One thing that was noted about Bill above is that he is a great storyteller, and so Damian suggested that perhaps a word triggers off a story to tell. *“We all have good and bad days. Next time try him with warm-up activities like his word puzzle books he seems to enjoy.”* Later experience showed that these word puzzle books were very significant for Bill, and became the key to developing his vocabulary to move from single words to whole sentences. The tutor working with Bill commented at a later date on her experience of support from Damian:

*“He has fully trusted in me to sit down and ... I got so much confidence within the first two weeks of volunteering here, just from that attitude and having the chance and actually having some results of being able to help Bill, even. I didn’t know, I didn’t think I’d go - I didn’t know how I’d go, to be honest. So that’s worked out really well [laughs].”*

In this interaction it was clear that Damian tries to prioritise the wellbeing of the tutors, and support them in both their skills and their self-image. He made the comment “It’s not my intention for you to find a strategy. My intention is to walk in the student’s feet.”

- “Tutor1: I think some challenges for me are working with some people, and they’re not used to making their own choices. So for me just to tell them what to do, it’s - my challenge is trying to get them to make their own choices. I think that’s one of the challenges that...”*
- Interviewer: So that challenge of leading people into being an adult learner...*
- Tutor1: Yeah.*
- Tutor2: Yeah they say to me...*
- Interviewer: ...when people want you to be the teacher and say you tell me what to do.*
- Tutor2: Yeah they say to me oh you tell me, because you’re the teacher. They don’t know, they don’t realise, that this is for them. They get to choose what they get to do.*
- Tutor1: It’s their journey. It’s not ours. We’re going along for the ride...”*

So, not everyone will have the same capacities to use the tutor for their own ends, and Bill is an example of a student who frequently responds *“You’re the teacher”* when he is asked what he would like to do in the lesson. Building the confidence of students to take control of their own learning is therefore an important task of teacher and tutors.

While Damian makes the effort to keep the tutor and student relationship constant through the term, circumstances often demand changes. Nerissa identified that there are weaknesses in having changes in tutors, but also that each staff member and tutor brings different strengths. Damian reports that his relationship with the tutors must be one that stimulates their growth. On at least one occasion he had to temporarily retire a tutor because their approach was harmful to the student, but this is rare. In this case the tutor learnt to modify his approach and was reconnected with the student at a later date. However, once again, this reinforces the need for an adequate tutor training program, supervision and regular feedback.

At the time of observation the initial preparation of tutors was quite minimal, although one of the tangible results of the research project is that by the end of observations Damian had decided to fully develop the tutor-training package.



# PEDAGOGICAL THEMES

## Isolated congregation versus social inclusion



One of the tensions that emerges of locating the RAW group within A Place to Belong, at least in the minds of the staff, is the congruence of a group activity with the agency philosophy, that is, that people should be connected to their own communities and not gather in congregated settings of people with disabilities. The irony of the name “A Place to Belong”, however is that it may suggest that A Place to Belong is providing a place where people can come and feel that they belong, as much as helping people find their own “places to belong” (Shevellar, Sherwin et al. 2014). Drawing on Social Role Valorization theory A Place to Belong seeks to avoid creating enclaves of people with disability<sup>1</sup>. For this reason the researchers looked carefully at the rationalisation for a class located in a house in the community, and there is certainly a tension. Firstly, interviews with students revealed that in the main students liked this arrangement.

*“...I’ve met a lot of good people through coming here and I’ve gained friends from being involved within this group” (former student).*

For some students the classes provide an important social event. But this does not mean that they want to learn as a group.

*Eagle: “I do like the group as a whole, but when it comes down to, like, actually working, like, just one on one...It means I can swap things around. If I don’t want to sing songs first up I can do my book and if I don’t want to do my book I can sing songs.”*

One of the Mt Gravatt students, Perry, suggested that he found the group helpful, but mostly because of the tutors.

*Perry: The group, it’s good to have the support of others if you’re struggling. If it’s the right size, if it’s a small group, there’s not too much pressure put on you so...*

*Interviewer: But the people who give you support, are they the tutors or the other students? Or both.*

*Perry: Mainly the tutors at the moment.*

*Interviewer: Yep. Do you have any friends from your learning, from the other students?*

*Perry: Not close friends, no.*

The theory of situated literacy discussed below may indicate that the environment of the classroom is not as effective as the environment of community. However, another way to interpret situated literacy is that the classroom offers a laboratory environment where people can rehearse their interactions with community and develop skills. Taking these skills into real environments then becomes an adventure, where there might be varying experience of success. The class environment then becomes a place where those experiences can be debriefed and analysed, building on the conceptual understanding of the student and tutor or support worker, in partnership. The most important qualifier, however, is that the class experience does not become a substitute for society.

## Mastery and time

The feeling of developing mastery is empowering. Tusting (2000) draws out the significance of observing, experiencing and managing time as a literacy in itself. Time is omnipresent - newsletters coordinating community, stories and narratives of personal history, development, referencing others. A person with a demanding job and a young family to support may have a sense of time as a battle. To follow timetables may have a different meaning for a person with a disability who has an impoverished social and personal life, who lives in a hostel or institution with a minimum of meaningful activity, for whom time hangs heavy.

Building the sense of meaningful time is a literacy role. Taking on board skills such as keeping a diary or telling the time are important practical skills, however, one thing that the structure of RAW supports is a feeling for the cyclic nature of learning. Each term is structured into two four-week learning periods. The first week is an introductory one and in this lesson the teacher is introduced to the idea of having a goal. By the second week the learning goal is established. Lessons get more focused on literacy in the third week and the fourth week is for review and evaluation. Evaluation, review and planning appear to be constant. When Damian was asked about this frequency his rationale was that each evaluation will reveal successes and allow more refinement in approach. Sometimes he finds that a person is being tripped up by an almost miniscule problem, for example, not being able to tell a “p” from a “b”. It is also plausible that the cycle, by having frequent markers is providing a valuable measurement of time spent well and of a purposeful journey being taken.

The deeper purpose of time is related to its personal meaning; if your life has been chaotic or if your memories are in a mess, telling the story of your life is a meaningful way to reframe this experience and build a sense of time and accomplishment. This theme of narrative is an important aspect of the Recovery model that comes into community-based adult literacy in multiple ways.

## Narrative

One of the things that becomes evident in RAW is that everyone has a story. As the teacher and tutors get to know their adult learners, their story becomes part of the learning experience – not only for the storyteller, but for those who hear it as well. Stories can help us get to know a person better and they can be a source of inspiration and encouragement for others. The quote below illustrates the potency of telling one’s own story, a form of narrative therapy that rather than being professionally-centred is directed by the person with literacy support:

*“The currently popular outcome measures and standardised risk assessments, plotting individuals on an actuarial scale, are quintessentially modernist in their approach and aspirations. However laudable their purposes, they also serve to illustrate that the individually meaningful may not be the same as the reproducibly measurable. For example, Strauss... has described a young man with a long history of schizophrenia who had participated in successive research interviews over 10 years. When asked which was the worst year of his life he unexpectedly identified a period when the objective ratings of his psychopathology and social functioning were rather favourable but, unknown to the researchers, he was traumatically rejected by his family and although relatively well, felt abandoned. Strauss suggests that the rediscovery of an emphasis on the personal story may provide a means of overcoming the tendency endemic in psychiatry to neglect the personal and subjective aspects of an individual’s experience” (Roberts 2000).*

Re-telling your life (also called ‘re-authoring’ (Morgan 2000)) is a way of, in Damian’s words, “locating the person in their history” and reclaiming it from chaos and hardship. Narrative is a

grounding exercise. Grace uses the “Tardis” as metaphor in her writing for the sense of being thrown around in time. She felt impelled to walk around West End writing on books, magazines and even her own clothes. To the observer it seems as though her story has escaped its boundaries. However for this student, writing her story requires her to discover what she already knows.

*“Human beings are natural storytellers. In forms that range from traditional folk tales to reality TV, stories are told or performed in every known human culture. People construct and share stories about themselves, too, detailing particular episodes and periods in their lives and what those experiences mean to them. Out of the episodic particulars of autobiographical memory, a person may construct and internalise an evolving and integrative story for life, or what psychologists today call a narrative identity... Narrative identity reconstructs the autobiographical past and imagines the future in such a way as to provide a person’s life with some degree of unity, purpose, and meaning. Thus, a person’s life story synthesises episodic memories with envisioned goals, creating a coherent account of identity in time. Through narrative identity, people convey to themselves and to others who they are now, how they came to be, and where they think their lives may be going in the future.” (McAdams and McLean 2013)*

Literacy is about narrative used in different ways and for different purposes. The wider context of narrative is that it is playing an important part in both therapy (see for example, the Dulwich Centre (2014) and of Recovery in mental health (the Scottish Recovery Network<sup>2</sup>). The telling of stories in groups can have a political and liberating dimension as the work of Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal have demonstrated (Freire 1974, Boal 2001, Babbage 2004). Stories and narrative inform, provide insight, suggest models and solutions to problems, provoke emotions and motivate. They are also often enjoyable, and in fact are probably more effective the more enjoyable they are. But people with disabilities and mental health problems, as can be seen in the examples given, do not always have the ways and tools to tell their story (resources for capability), even though they may have the capacity. If that story has not been coherent then it is even more important to give it form. But it is also important that people can choose whether or not to share their story.

## Role-playing

Earlier, in the sample lesson, an example was cited of Alvin learning skills to deal with difficult situations through role-playing. The physical dimensions are engaged in RAW through a combination of simple bodywork and more difficult role-plays that help teach social understandings. The drama space is used in RAW as a middle zone between core skills (reading and writing) and experiential learning; as a rehearsal for real world learning.

Firstly, Damian uses the introductory period creatively to warm up students and tutors and to also teach skills to do with personal communication and empowerment. The warm-up exercises observed focused on memory activation and on empowerment. One of the more successful examples of the first was an exercise in which the first person in the circle was asked to give themselves a nickname and also a physical movement which illustrates that, for example, “I’m Bridget and I’m busy” (with hands whirling around). The next person in the circle was asked to repeat that and then add their own name and action. This progresses around the circle until there are quite a number of nicknames and actions to remember. Occasionally these kind of games have unexpected consequences. One version that did not work but was also very funny occurred when people were asked to mention one article they had bought yesterday and the shop they had bought it from. Bill immediately and unwittingly sabotaged it by meandering off into a story about how he had returned some milk the previous day. In general, it appeared as though the games were well-received and had a functional objective of putting people into the right mind space for learning.

In addition, Damian has drawn on some of the theory and techniques of Augusto Boal and the Theatre of the Oppressed (Boal 2001, Babbage 2004). Over three weeks he introduced an exercise that appeared designed to empower people to identify and respond positively to oppression. Groups of two or three students and tutors were asked to create a static scenario that represents a situation of disrespect, as though they were clay statues. Usually people set up groups where one person took a dominant threatening position and the others cowered or appeared defensive. In Mt Gravatt, one group modelled “State oppression”; another group modelled “ignoring the oppressed”, and others made it more personal. The next week he reintroduced the topic and then asked how we would model “getting rid of the oppression”. In general, people’s postures would change to indicate a more assertive stance, for example standing up to and facing the oppressor. One tutor commented that you could change your expression but without changing your posture physically it would not have an effect. People practiced this. Damian insisted that the posture be real and not a “miracle”, in other words, what you actually could and would do.

Literacy supports the enhancement of self-identity, which includes the physical dimension. If one’s sense of physical competency has been eroded over the years, then to recover or discover the ability to handle your physical expression (physical literacies) with confidence can radically alter the way that you see the world. If people are made invisible or misrepresented in the public sphere it becomes that much easier to deny them basic rights of participation in society. Encouraging people to move between the private and the public realm with confidence is an important part of the RAW pedagogy and as Damian feels confident with drama as self-expression and self-realisation he embeds it in sessions. As the role play about oppression described above illustrates, however, there is a possibility that it will affect people negatively and so it is important that people both understand what they are engaging with and that they give their consent to the more confronting issues being explored. De-briefing after the role play is critical in this respect.

## Literacy and creativity

Literacy is also about creativity. Eagle has advanced his literacy by writing a novella. He believes that he has dyslexia although he is undiagnosed, because although he had lots of literacy lessons when he was young, he still gets the sounds wrong. *“I’ve been learning to write a book by sometimes just typing words down and they all look muddled up and stuff.”* Eagle also wrote a song with the help of a music therapist during the course of the research observations. Both were things he wanted to do but he was unsure of his capability. His plan is to get his story published and maybe eventually turned into a movie.

While writing a book or a story may not directly appear connected to social inclusion, this student has already sung his song at a public gathering, demonstrably increasing his confidence. Reading and writing allows you to get into other people’s imaginative space in a different way to movies. In McLuhan’s terms reading is a cool medium compared to the hot media of TV and movies (McLuhan and Fiore 1967). When you read, your mind is making up pictures. These pictures then enter your lexicon and can be used in Design of new work (see Multiliteracies below, p42). Eagle is using the mythology of dragons to write his own story, re-using some themes, and cobbling themes from other genres, fairy stories and Science Fiction.

Some students were writing their own literacy resource readers. Many readers are not directed at adults, or if they are, they tend to be English as a Second Language texts. Some readers sighted had stories which involve acorns and chestnuts in the snow. When Gabriel read this he asked *“What’s a chestnut?”* He was told and said *“I know marijuana.”* And proceeded to relate a story about his youth when the locals used to grow and smoke marijuana. What an interesting reader that would be! Through that story the student identified that he knew words like roots and shoots and seeds *“It’s shaped like a hand, smells bad, has white blossoms”* revealing the students detailed imaginative powers. RAW is responding to the dearth of readers by producing its own readers.



## First order versus second order needs

The presenting or immediate request of the student (for example, *'to learn to read and write'*) may be followed, sometimes after a long period, with the emergence of a more deeply rooted and more deeply felt need. This deeper need, which may be, for example, to find intimacy and security (a safe place to live) we are describing as a "first order need", even though it may not be the first need to present itself. It is of the order that it is the most important, the one that is most deeply yearned for, and that A Place to Belong would describe as the need/s to be 'honoured'<sup>3</sup> by the agency. It is the first order need also on a philosophical level because it relates to the personal identity or Being of a person (Heidegger 2008), and the one whose satisfaction is most likely to lead to a growth in fulfillment and happiness of the person.

Pursuing this logic, sometimes the need that people come with (for example, *"to learn to read and write"*), or the need that others might call a "presenting need" is of a second order, or as Neil Barringham commented, of the "sixteenth order", because the experience of working with people over many years to foster their inclusion in community may mean working through many needs that are real enough (*"I want a credit card like anyone else"*), but that may actually work against the achievement of the core and essential need (in this example, to be in control of your own money). The analogy that suggests itself is of the layers of an onion. As people gain in skills and confidence, including their growth of ability with literacy, they may also become more confident to express desires for things that they may have been denied for years, and decades. Grace's desire for *"wellbeing"* and *"sustainability"*, that emerged after a number of years working with RAW and hanging around A Place to Belong attending meetings and listening to the discourse of others is an example of the time it may take for such a deep need to express itself. Not that, of course, this is always the case. Sometimes people may walk through the door looking for help in the satisfaction of the first order need that they have already identified.

Nerissa puts it like this:

*"Definitely locate what it is that you - what your passion is and so have your end goal and then find the steps and with everybody here the suggestions that come through, find a way to build that ladder and make each step of the way to get there because it is possible. It's one step at a time. It looks like a massive ladder when you're looking to the top of it but just to know what - find what is in you - what you're good at, what makes you happy. What makes you happy because if you're happy about it, if it makes you happy, you'll be good at it... Yeah, and don't give up on yourself, just keep - just little bit by bit and like Damien used to say to me, 'Nerissa you're being impatient' because I'd go, 'I'm not getting anywhere. I'm frustrated today, I can't do this thing, I just want to know how to make this do that and I can't do it and I'm -' and he'd go, 'look what about last week - last week, at least you've got that - remember what you achieved last week? Or what you achieved since three months ago' and I'd look back and go oh, yeah good point."*

People also discover more advanced needs after they have achieved their original goals. One student, Jacob, commented, for example, that *"My goals have changed...I got bored of them and made them a little bit higher in sky sort of thing."* He initially had specific goals when he started *"about purely reading and writing better, understanding what is on the page..."* and now he has turned those goals into ones more focussed on employment.

Once a first order need is identified, Damian notes that it may become apparent that the skills to achieve that need are lacking. His approach then is to break that need or overarching goal into smaller units of knowledge (or microskills). That might be as simple as learning to use a USB and increasing confidence with technology, or a difficult as learning to write his desire to live independently. This is why RAW has adopted a four week cycle with constant evaluation.

It gives an opportunity for the first order goal to emerge, or for other goals, which come closer to the first order needs, and each review gives an opportunity to go a bit deeper. But as Damian commented this is not a process that can be forced. The critical ethical discussion here is consistent with the Recovery model of mental health (discussed below at page 44), and that is that the expert in a person's life is the person themselves, not their supporters, medical staff or family, although all of these people can contribute support. There is no room, from a point of superior understanding to tell or direct the person to the correct understanding of what their needs are.

Social Role Valorization theory makes the telling point that people with disabilities have been denied many opportunities in their life that are essential to the skill of choice making, in itself an essential micro-skill of self-determination (see Social Role Valorization p46). They may, indeed, have been denied the agency of choice itself except at a superficial level (*"Do you want peas or potato for dinner?"*, *"Do you want to come out and look at the Christmas lights?"*) or in a context where choice becomes non-normative (such as in an institution for the disabled). So there is a difficult tension that it takes considerable courage and skill to negotiate – the person is the expert in their own life, but they may need some help in discovering what that means.

Ironically, world literature and the media presents many pictures of this dilemma for people without obvious disabilities (for example, 'Anna Karenina', 'Madame Bovary', 'Sons and Lovers'). One of the distinguishing features of the practice of A Place to Belong is firstly to trust people's judgements about what they want, and then to stick with people as they discover that perhaps what they want is not what they really need or want, which is not necessarily a comfortable experience. One of the interesting dimensions of literacy learning that emerges is that RAW provides a safe place to explore those needs, however there is a point at which the person and their supports needs to interact with challenges of real-life. Gabriel provides a good example of this. His desire to leave his group home and to move into independent housing has been expressed through the telling of his story, but now Damian is supporting Gabriel to write letters to his accommodation support agency to help him advocate for and express this need, among others. At a certain point he will need to make this move and at that point there are many points of safety and risk to be planned for and negotiated. The dilemma here, in taking on deep respect for the wishes of the other person as they create their lives (*"The basic need is to be a convivial service, not a manipulative one"* – Damian) is to live with and negotiate the tension which sometimes exists between what a person says they want to do, what they really want to do and the teacher's and tutor's own perceptions of what they think are in the person's interest.

For people acting as supporters, allies or teachers and tutors, developing knowledge about a person can be two-edged. Gabriel's ally, as described above in the story of the sample class, resisted Gabriel's own expressed desire to live independently, based on the ally's fears that Gabriel would not be able to manage his health needs. His care and commitment to Gabriel is not doubted based on years of close connection, but even though prior knowledge can add to understanding, it can also be, or become, restrictive, and close the doors to thinking creatively about managing risk. If it takes time for the person to express their needs, and if it takes time to achieve a balanced mutual trust and understanding so that a reasoned and respectful path of action may be developed it becomes clearer why mainstream courses, designed to push people through curricula goals, will not meet the needs of some people with complex issues. This of course is not a new tension or dilemma but it is one of the core issues that has to be grappled with in order to achieve 'profound' individualisation rather than 'trivial' or 'insignificant' individualisation, in a service that wishes to call itself 'person-centred' (Kendrick 2007).

1 "A great danger exists when we make the mistake of believing that people with disability cannot get their needs met in largely the same way that other people do. This is because it leads us to setting people with disability aside from other in so called 'special' places and programs, as if these are the only way that they will get what they need in life. More often than not, they will get much less." Kendrick, M. (2008). "SRV As A Resource for Seeking and Shaping the Good Life." *Families for Change* 3(7): 3-5.

## Part Two: Practice frameworks

Part One has highlighted some of the key themes and issues that were raised by observations of RAW. Part Two reviews the most significant frameworks that are used that may be of interest to practitioners or to people who are interested in establishing such a group. The first focus is around frameworks of Literacy, and the second focus around frameworks of social inclusion. We conclude this second with a description of RAW's pedagogy which was largely written by Damian Le Goullon, the RAW teacher.

### Discourses and frameworks of literacy

There are differing discourses around the meaning of literacy and its relevance for society and individuals. The realist position can be described broadly as “functional”, and reflects a consensus of community views of why people need to be able to read and write. The alternative direction tries to unsettle the assumptions that underlie this discourse, and to open up the discussion to consider the marginalised aspects of literacy itself and of the marginalised people who are affected by a lack of socially valued literacy skills. In current thinking, situated literacies and multiliteracy approaches represent the interpretivist or constructivist position. Both functionalist and interpretivist perspectives are relevant to community-based literacy learning, and create a dialectic that can be valuable in determining future directions. Both perspectives however, have to be subjected to critique. While the functional approach lays too heavy an emphasis on employability, the alternative perspective can appear non-pragmatic.

In the functionalist paradigm, literacy has a liberating potential in a highly technological society.

“Functional literacy...relates more to levels of skills that individuals or populations need in order to complete some specified real-life reading task. For example, in the area of human welfare, reading skills are variously required to realise outcomes with respect to job, transportation, and economic necessities. Similarly, these skills are also used to obtain food, shelter, clothing, health care, etc. Thus, functional literacy is defined here as reading (comprehending printed materials) to obtain, retain, or maximize and end or goal which has “survival” value” (Kirsch and Guthrie 1977-78, p490).

People with disabilities, particularly learning impairments, are frequently excluded from mainstream learning opportunities and education (Kliwer, Bicklen et al. 2006). When we realise that reading and writing underpins not just the sophisticated task of reading our culture, but of the functional tasks of taking a bus, knowing how much something costs, finding it in the supermarket, getting a driving license, reading a lease, looking at apartment advertisements and keeping meeting times, it is obvious that exclusion from literacy skills is in itself exclusion from society.

As early as the 1970s Kirsch and Guthrie reviewed the measurement tools around functional literacy, and found significant issues with the functional approach: The emphasis on verbal and written skills overlooks the importance of other practical competencies (1977-78, p491); to the extent that societies change, people who may be classified as literate at one time and in one society may not be so at another time or in another society (op. cit., p492); as the attainment of functional competencies is a lifelong process, scores on measures only show a person's functioning at a point in time.

“...classifying an individual as “illiterate” seems too simplistic a label, carrying with it social stigmas which are not easily erased. In addition, this term does not accurately identify the

specific tasks and skills levels currently possessed by the individual. It seems more appropriate to represent functional literacy as continuously distributed, with various points along the continuum indicating different levels of functioning “ (ibid).

A more recent definition of functional literacy by UNESCO emphasises not only the competencies of individuals in community, but also some more recent thought that reflects literacy as a product of community:

“...a person is functionally literate who can engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for the effective function of his or her group and community and also for enabling him or her to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his or her own and the community’s development.” (UNESCO 2002)

A critical and positive aspect of functional literacy defined in this way is that it reflects positive engagement and inclusion in the community. People with effective levels of literacy may not consciously realise the power that literacy gives them. The Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey (ALLS) demonstrates that people with levels of literacy 5 and higher have a 90% rate of employment (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006). The functional approach is therefore of immediate relevance and cannot be discounted but, in contrast to the functional approach, two paradigms, situated literacy and multiliteracy take a more holistic approach that has much to offer the community-based literacy program that is trying to be flexible and to work with the literacies of the individual.

## Situated Literacy

Situated literacy was advanced by a group of practitioners and thinkers through the 1980s and 1990s resulting in some innovative research into the nature of literacy, collectivised into the New Literacy Studies (Barton, Hamilton et al. 2000). Barton and Hamilton advance six propositions of situated literacy:

- literacy is best understood as a set of social practices; these can be inferred from events which are mediated by written texts;
- there are different literacies associated with different domains of life;
- literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationships, and some literacies are more dominant, visible and influential than others;
- literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices; and
- literacy is historically situated.

A foundational statement of the concept of situated literacy originates with Brown, Collins and Duguid’s (1989, p.7) study of situated cognition and learning. Brown Collins and Duguid argue that most if not all language is indexical. This is an important distinction because indexicality means that all linguistic units (words and sentences) are only understandable or have meaning within the context of their use. There is no such thing as a table of words that make sense whenever they are used. For example “you” or “I”, which only ever make sense in regard to the people who are using them. The argument of Brown Collins and Duguid is that learning in schools abstracts concepts from the real situation, that is experience of institutionalised school environments do not equip students for “real-life”. They are instead institutionalised environments that only make sense within their own semantic universe. A key concept advanced by Brown Collins and Duguid is that “...to learn to use tools as practitioners use them, a student, like an apprentice, must enter the community and its culture” (op.cit., p33).



Macbeth challenges Brown, Collins and Duguid's argument that the school environment is not as authentic as real life (2011). He argues instead that the school provides its own "situatedness", and that people negotiate real skills in learning. The point appears a little academic as Brown, Collins and Duguid are not denying the role of schools in literacy, but instead arguing for a model of learning that is closer to apprenticeship. The examples that they choose in mathematics learning are not immediately close to real-life (e.g. solving magic squares) but continue to focus on better absorption of the reality of mathematical thinking.

This raises a question that is critical to the teaching of literacy in community. One rationale for community education is that it captures those people who cannot immediately access mainstream education providers such as TAFE. However, if peoples' goals include enrolling in mainstream courses then it becomes important for the community programs to consider how a person is going to survive and thrive in the "situated" environment of TAFE. Again, if peoples' goals include employment then they also need to understand the "situated" literacies and environments of employment. It may be that the best place for people to learn these situated literacies is not in community but in mainstream education, which is focussed on equipping people for the employment world. The most helpful thing which a community service could offer at that point is to "fast-track" their referral, and to assist people to enroll in TAFE or other mainstream institutions, rather than continue them in the environment of the community agency which may not have the expertise to help people find a job.

## **Multiliteracies**

The thinking described above, around Situated Literacies, intersects with an important new direction taken in the 1990s by The New London Group (Cazden, Cope et al. 1996, The New London Group 2000). The group argues that rapidly changing working, public and personal lives and roles requires not just one grammar or literacy. Fragmented society consisting of changing ethnic demographics and cultures require citizens to think in multiliteracies, which raises important questions for teaching: such as the what and how of literacy pedagogy (The New London Group 2000, p19). They argue that literacies are constantly re-made, with people inheriting the components of literacy and remaking it. Literacy has linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, spatial and synthesising modes.

Gunther Kress, a noted developer of discourse analysis and a member of the New London Group, calls for a new approach to semiotics (2003), one which has a lot of importance for literacy in the community context. The elements of this approach will incorporate the multimodal aspects of communication and the changing value of language dependent on its context of use (op.cit., p154). This kind of concern connects also with the roots of linguistics. Ferdinand de Saussure (1974), one of the founders of linguistics, drew the distinction between the immediate meaning of "words" or linguistic items and their actual value. We just have to think of the first words taught to children in the English language, such as "C-A-T", and then its use in contexts: "Watch out for the cat!"; "She's/He's such a cat!"; "Fat Cats". These words connect to rich emotional, political and social contexts, but they also connect to immediate conversations where each phrase might have completely different values.

The major criticism of many contemporary approaches to literacy is that they consider individuals as users, rather than makers of language. Kress argues that modern life has a greater amount of change than ever in the history of man, and that this change is affecting the use of language. Language is not so much being constantly invented as re-designed, that is, its elements are appropriated and used in new ways.

“Instead of regarding individuals as mere users of the system, who produce no change, we need to see that changes take place always, incessantly, and that they arise as a result of the interested actions of individuals” (2003,p155)

The impact of this on community literacy teaching is that when a person asks to “learn to read”, we and she need to ask the questions “What?” and “Why?”, and orient learning to the emerging need and desire, and the modality in which it is expressed.

Allan Luke, an influential Australian literacy academic and policy analyst, is a supporter of this approach to multiliteracies (2003). He argues that narrowly tying literacy to economic opportunity drives a ‘test and compliance’ model (op cit, p.63), which leads to a narrowing down and loss of the range of literacies, and the important skills of self-expression. Rather than focusing on a narrow range of skills we should be scanning and assessing the community environment which supports literacy and a variety of human service frameworks that work with people to help them realise their goals and aspirations.

Literacy theories and frameworks can also be connected to human service principles and practice. The RAW program is one of few programs that co-locates a community development and social support service with a literacy group. Traditionally, education and welfare have been seen as distinct and have been separate in practice. When working with adult learners with disabilities and mental illness there are many benefits to addressing the expressed needs of people in a more holistic fashion, as has been illustrated already in this report. What follows is an articulation of the frameworks that inform the social inclusion support work that RAW and A Place to Belong provide.



# RELEVANT FRAMEWORKS AND PRINCIPLES FROM SOCIAL SERVICES

## Community development and literacy



It would be hard to attempt an authentically inclusive understanding of community literacy in the current era without considering the monumental figure of Paulo Friere, whose legacy as an activist and worker in adult literacy has a great influence over the field (Friere 1974, Monclus 1988, Slater, Fain et al. 2002). It is also necessary to situate it within the community development arc, not simply because both community literacy and community development share a common adjective, but because there is an inherent politicisation in the work of teaching literacy that needs to be drawn out and commented upon. RAW is situated within an agency with strong links to community development.

Friere argued against the rote transfer of knowledge that reproduces the social conditions that keep people poor and oppressed. He also argued that education by the oppressors (i.e. the State) cannot liberate. A Frierean analysis of literacy policy as it affects the marginalised in Australia would say that the emphasis on literacy for vocation is to prepare people to fill roles in an economy where they have no authentic autonomy (e.g. low wage casualised work). A literacy education that results in people reclaiming their humanity would need to be engineered with the people themselves. This is distinctly not a model that would support teacher-student relationships of power where knowledge of a certain type is transferred, which he referred to as the “banking” model of education. Rather, “(a) revolutionary leadership must accordingly practice co-intentional education” (Friere 1974, p56).

“... the interests of the oppressors lie in “changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation which oppresses them”; for the more the oppressed can be led to adapt to that situation, the more easily they can be dominated. To achieve this aim, the oppressors use the banking concept of education in conjunction with a paternalistic social action apparatus, within which the oppressed receive the euphemistic title of “welfare recipients”...The oppressed are regarded as the pathology of the healthy society, which must therefore adjust these “incompetent and lazy” folk to its own patterns by changing their mentality.”(op.cit., p60)

A liberating pedagogy is much more the co-production of knowledge, where the student-teacher relationship is equalised. It entails a radical valuing of the experience and knowledge of the other person. The wider value of Friere’s pedagogy to community literacy in Australia is to enlarge its possibilities. There are numerous moments in the practice of community literacy that are political. Even if the model of delivery is not overtly political, or seeking systemic change, for many people achieving control over literacy is in itself an act of seeking control over their lives; being able to express your need is the first step in attaining greater autonomy and control and being able to participate in public life. Freire’s notion of the conscious co-production of knowledge between adults can result in the co-production of texts that reflect students’ lives and their goals, which is consistent with a recovery approach to mental illness.

## Recovery

Another framework utilised by RAW is that of Recovery, which is both a model of mental health recovery and the name for a social movement among people with diagnosed psychiatric illness over the last twenty years. Recovery has become a key aspect of mental health policy in Australia and overseas. As a social movement it has a long genesis. Its archaic roots are probably in the 19th century, with isolated initiatives taken by people in the USA (Frese and Davis 1997). Around the turn of the twentieth century the individualistic and optimistic culture of the USA generated positive movements for self-help, notably the twelve-step program for substance abuse. But it was perhaps the mid-century civil rights movement for the social and economic liberation of African-Americans that was its main impetus. Out of the struggles of the civil rights movement arose the rights movements of marginalised groups, women and gay people. This was also the beginning of the user/survivor movement that saw the problems of mental health not as an individual problem but one that was social and structural (O'Hagan 2004, Ramon, Healy et al. 2007, p108, NSW Consumer Advisory Group - Mental Health Inc. (NSW CAG) 2009, pp12-13). Among the groups of mental patients who organised against the dominance of the psychiatric process at this time were the Insane Liberation Front, the Mental Patients' Liberation Project and the Mental Patients' Liberation Front (Frese and Davis 1997, p244).

A number of factors for the gradual emergence of Recovery into mental health policy have been credited: some studies which demonstrated that people could recover from schizophrenia and mental illness, although the fact that these did not originate in the USA limited the impact of these studies; the de-institutionalisation movement which placed people back into the community and at least in theory gave them a chance to lead normal lives (Anthony 1993, Ramon, Healy et al. 2007); the social model of disability and the associated strengths model which argued that people have strengths and weaknesses which they learn to overcome, and if they do not the fault is due to social barriers (Ramon, Healy et al. 2007).

Anthony's definition published in 1993 is often cited as a moment when Recovery began to solidify around some specific values (NSW Consumer Advisory Group - Mental Health Inc. (NSW CAG) 2009, p18):

"Recovery is described as a deeply personal, unique process of changing one's attitudes, values, feelings, goals, skills, and/or roles. It is a way of living a satisfying, hopeful, and contributing life even with limitations caused by illness. Recovery involves the development of new meaning and purpose in one's life as one grows beyond the catastrophic effects of mental illness" (1993).

Recovery from mental illness is a movement/model that is evolving as it impacts on global policy in mental health. It has two aspects, which are at times complementary, and which at times create conflict; one being the recovery recognised within the medical model, which is characterised by a reduction of symptoms, and the other the recovery recognised by the person with the mental illness, a recovery that will probably incorporate elements of the medical model, but will go much further in terms of reclaiming the right to define and live one's own life.

"It is perhaps not surprising then, that although the service users who introduced the notion of recovery to mental health services referred to rebuilding a meaningful life despite-even enriched by-ongoing symptoms, mental health professionals consider it to mean something more like 'cure'" (Repper 2006).



Julie Repper makes a crucial point here, which is sometimes hard for professionals to recognise, and that is that mental illness in all its varied, terrible and wonderful forms, is part of the stream of life; there is no going back - *“There simply is no way back to how you were before those problems began”* (ibid). That being so there is only one logical path, forward.

“Recovery is the process of moving forward from all this, of rebuilding a satisfying and meaningful life with mental health problems, of finding new meaning and purpose in your life. But perhaps this is more accurately described as a personal journey of discovery” (ibid).

As a movement, Recovery has reached a new turning point: *“Discovery is the new recovery”* (ibid). Reframed, this has some radical consequences. Firstly, Discovery is perhaps a short hand for the life that an ordinarily capacitated individual seeks to live – in utilitarian terms, the individual is seeking to maximise the utility or happiness that they can accumulate. People with mental illness, who may in fact be walking around with a variety of impairments that are invisible to the world, seek exactly the same sense of renewal, discovery and wellbeing with life that is naturally sought by all people. A medical definition of recovery is inadequate to grasp this deeper meaning of the word, and we need to activate other tools and experiences to help us to understand it.

A second consequence is that the experience gained through living through or living with an illness or mental health condition is a resource – as Repper says above, although painful, it can provide a perspective from which to view life that can be argued to have validity. In the movie *“Melancholia”*, the lead character, who suffers disabling depression, says at one point *“I see things”*; things that other people do not see.

The first fully-fledged adoption of recovery in Australia occurred in the Third National Mental Health Plan of 2003. For the first time the overall guidance of a National Plan adopted the phraseology of recovery rather than structural reform and early intervention, although Recovery had been in use among community-based NGOS before then (Ramon, Healy et al. 2007, p115). Patrick McGorry, Australian of the Year in 2010, had written on the concept of Recovery as early as 1992 (ibid) and has been a strong advocate for the integration of mental health care with primary care structures based in the community. Recovery then percolated down into the States’ mental health policies. The Queensland Plan for Mental Health 2007-2017 encapsulates principles of Resilience and Recovery and Social Inclusion, although this is seen largely within the continuum of clinical mental health treatment (Mental Health Branch 2008).

## **Social Role Valorization theory**

Social Role Valorization (SRV) is a tool of both social analysis and intervention. It provides an explanation of the process of social devaluation, that is, how people with certain characteristics and identities are routinely and systematically marginalized and “wounded”, and it provides a set of ideas and strategies to counter this wounding. SRV is a meta-theory meaning that, in providing this analysis, it draws together a range of social theories including social perception, semiotics, labeling theory, role theory, the developmental model, expectations and self-fulfilling prophecy, and the issue of personal competency enhancement (Lemay 1995).

Proponents of SRV argue that as a tool of social intervention SRV has the potential to help people who have been devalued by society to gain greater access to the good things of life (such as higher status, positive regard, relationships, a home and the experiences of contribution and belonging to community life) and to be spared at least some negative effects of social devaluation. It does so through the “enablement, establishment, enhancement, maintenance and/or defense of valued

social roles for people, particularly for those at value risk, by using as much as possible culturally valued means” (Wolfensberger 1992, p21). SRV has influenced disability and institutional reform in Australia, many of its principles being embodied in reformist legislation and instruments over the decades of the 1980s and 1990s including the Disability Service Standards, Disability Services Act and Disability Discrimination Act (Disability Services Australia 2013).

SRV has been critiqued methodologically and ideologically. A particular challenge to service provision in the field of mental health is that SRV is culturally normative. In other words, the theory asserts that if people reflect the culturally valued roles in the community, then they are more likely to escape devalued roles and receive the good things in life (Thomas and Wolfensberger 1999). Critics question who defines what is valued and in whose interest cultural norms exist. They argue that SRV fails to interrogate and challenge hegemonic ideas and simply settles for prevailing norms. Finally, there is the argument that the implementation of the theory is paternalistic, negating agency and free choice and the possibility of the individual negotiating his or her own subjectivities (Burton 1983, Chappell 1992, Bleasdale 1996, Campbell 1998). The counter argument is that social devaluation and divisiveness is an innate part of the human condition. Thus the ideology of unbridled free choice must be mediated by an understanding of its costs. Freedoms are bought at the price of compliance, a cooperation with the “rules” of society (Armstrong 2007). The moral position that a person should simply be valued “as he or she is” is considered naïve because it ignores the likely consequences for people already vulnerable to harm (Lemay 1995).

Because A Place to Belong recognises the ongoing vulnerability of many of the people it supports, SRV is utilised in three main ways. The first is the provision of support for people to attain, maintain and enhance valued social roles such as family member, friend, neighbor, employee, or volunteer. RAW is seen as a powerful means of assisting this, by enabling the development of relevant competencies. For example Tristan’s ability to read to his son is one way in which his role of “father” is being enhanced. Likewise, assisting Laura to explore alternative media through the iPad assists her to develop her role as “painter”.

The second way in which SRV guides the work of A Place to Belong is the prevention of further wounding, by avoiding the creation of devalued environments where, for example, people with disabilities congregate and so therefore carry a risk of being seen as negatively different with low social status. This concept is particularly challenging in the case of RAW, which provides classes for people with disability. While the overall judgment is that the environment provides more benefits than negatives, it remains a tension. To counter the limits of a congregated model in RAW, the intention is that students should exit to normal community settings as soon as they are able.

Thirdly A Place to Belong and the RAW program draw on the SRV promotion of potency: “that there be an appreciation of the sacredness of each person’s lifetime, and that therefore, the person’s time not be wasted in irrelevance or even inactivity, but instead, that effective and intense use be made of the time the person spends in a service” (Wolfensberger 1992, p46).

## **Strengths and capabilities**

The notion of personal strengths has become an important part of social work practice, with the intention that professionals should focus on the inherent strengths of a person or family and build on them to aid recovery. It aims to foster hope by focusing on what is or has been historically successful for the person, thereby exposing precedent successes as the groundwork for realistic expectations and it also aims to reduce the power and authority barrier between the person and therapist by promoting the person to the level of expert in regards to what has worked, what does

not work, and what might work in their situation. This framework also acknowledges that a wide range of groups and institutions can provide support including family, friends, work, faith, sporting groups, and local businesses. A strengths perspective encourages service providers to seek out the full range of support available in a local community rather than only relying on welfare and specialist support organisations (Stuart, 2012).

Similar to a strengths perspective is the human capabilities framework. This theory was developed in the 1980s by the economist Amartya Sen to emphasise what individuals are able to do. Initially Sen argued for five components in assessing capability:

1. The importance of real freedoms in the assessment of a person's advantage.
2. Individual differences in the ability to transform resources into valuable activities.
3. The multivariate nature of activities giving rise to happiness.
4. A balance of materialistic and non-materialistic factors in evaluating human welfare.
5. Concern for the distribution of opportunities within society.

Within this framework poverty is understood as capability-deprivation. It is noteworthy that the emphasis is not only on how human beings actually function but also on their having the capability, which is a practical choice, to achieve outcomes that they value and have reason to value (Sen 1999). Importantly, the human capabilities framework does not privilege economic participation, for while it may include financial security, it rests upon the moral significance of individuals' capability of achieving the kind of lives they have reason to value, which may include time to develop loving relationships, to play, to develop voice and political freedom.

According to both the social model and the capabilities framework, measuring poverty or well-being by income alone is misleading; at the very least, incomes must be adjusted to take account of the extra costs imposed by a combination of personal characteristics (including impairment) and the social, physical and economic environment (including disability). Another feature which the social model of disability and the capabilities framework have in common is the recognition of societal barriers to equality, and the central role accorded to discrimination (Burchardt, 2004). Finally, the capabilities framework draws attention to the social causes of inequality because individual freedom is quintessentially a social product (Sen 1999).

## **Social inclusion**

Narrowly defined, social inclusion is about your ability to get and hold a job, and to become economically self-reliant (Marston 2008). This is a "thin" view of what social inclusion means. An alternative view of social inclusion privileges the links to communities of choice and meaningful engagement, meaningful in the sense that it is determined by the person themselves rather than the government. In this case meaningful social connectedness may not involve paid employment or even mainstream education, but will reflect goals established by the person themselves. If we take the human capabilities approach seriously then we want to see a much wider conception of what it means to be included and we would pay more attention to the processes of exclusion and the relationship between the housed and the unhoused, the employed and the unemployed as this would draw attention to relations of inequality and injustice that sustain privilege and power.

Citizens can be excluded from political processes, from education, from informal social networks, from secure housing and from cultural, sporting and recreation activities. Therefore, there is no reason to assume that paid employment is the royal road to inclusion. However, the political commitment for implementing a multi-dimensional social inclusion agenda has been somewhat

lacking in Australia. The incoming Rudd Labor Government announced its social inclusion agenda in 2007 and shortly thereafter established a Social Inclusion ministerial portfolio (initially held by then Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard) and a Social Inclusion Board in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet in December 2007. According to the first annual report of the Social Inclusion Board, the government was committed to a social inclusion agenda that is ‘about building a stronger, fairer nation in which every Australian gets a fair go at the things that make for an active and fulfilling life’. Being socially included was said to mean:

“...that people have the resources, opportunities and capabilities they need to: learn (participate in education and training); work (participate in employment, unpaid or voluntary work including family and carer responsibilities); engage (connect with people, use local services and participate in local, cultural, civic and recreational activities); and, have a voice (influence decisions that affect them)” (Australian Social Inclusion Board n.d.)

Similar to Europe, the emphasis in the above definition is on rights and responsibilities, the need to be active in either learning or earning, which stands in opposition to the construction of social assistance as ‘passive welfare’. The above definition also makes reference to the right of citizens to have a voice, to be involved in decisions that affect them, which partly reflects the growing strength of the consumer rights movement in health and disability in Australia and other advanced economies. In practice, the Australian Government pursued a fairly narrow ‘welfare to work’ policy agenda under the social inclusion banner, an approach that offered an insufficient response to other factors that lead to social isolation and entrenched disadvantage (such as chronic health problems, incarceration, permanent disability and discrimination). As such, some of the assumptions in the Australian social inclusion agenda were that unemployment equals exclusion, that paid work equals inclusion and that non-paid work by itself cannot achieve inclusion (van Berkel and Moeller 2002).

The fate of the social inclusion policy agenda is unclear in light of the change of government in 2013 to a Coalition Government, led by Prime Minister Tony Abbott. The demise of the ALP Government will probably mean that social inclusion is no longer a guiding framework or policy priority. This does not mean that the idea of inclusion and exclusion will have no utility. It all depends on how they are used and by whom. In the literacy and numeracy field it is possible to talk about the enabling role that reading and writing plays in living a full life, while at the same time identifying education principles and practices that are inclusive of student diversity and needs. In this report, therefore, we take the position that the dominant view of social inclusion misses many important dimensions. In our view it is a “thin” version as we began this description and later, in the Policy section we will address more fully how a “thicker” version of social inclusion can be envisioned.

## **Socially inclusive learning**

Not a great deal has been written explicitly about the interrelationship between literacy and social inclusion, although the pedagogical framework of multiliteracy, which was discussed earlier, has implicit but undeveloped links with the concept. One of the most notable links between social inclusion and adult literacy has to do with motivation; adults pursue literacy skills as a path towards inclusion. The results of a small 2009 study (Koblik, Kidd et al. 2009) reveal that adults want to learn in order to feel better connected with and improve their access to mainstream culture, in addition to building vocational skills. Participants described the learning experience as a boost to their self-esteem and confidence. Demetrian cites as a primary goal of adult literacy education, enhancing a person’s ability to participate in a variety of social settings, such as paying bills, reading the Bible, or understanding materials sent home from a child’s school (1998).



These are critical skills which make valued social roles such as parent and neighbor, accessible to people. However, at a more fundamental level than the acquisition of skills, literacy is a mark of the citizen, a person who engages in the civil and civic life of the community. Although one can understand important social issues without being able to read and write, people do not appear as more than specific advocates for specific issues, or stand for legislative office who do not have literacy capacities. Moni and Jobling (2011) argue that incorporating popular culture into adult literacy programming can provide learners with important social capital that supports their desire to be more like their peers.

An analysis of nine decades of research in elementary literacy implies that differences amongst pupils tend to be perceived as disabilities (Dutro and Collins 2011). In other words, students whose learning needs diverge from those of their classmates are automatically assumed to be less capable, though this may not be the case. Goldstein, (2011) takes this idea a step further, referring to many students labeled learning disabled as casualties of an educational system whose teachers were not sufficiently trained to teach them to read. He claims that almost all students are able to learn to read when they receive suitable instruction. Regardless, statistics indicate that whether or not most students are capable of learning to read, large numbers of children do not read at their grade level. In the United States, up to 33% of 4th graders and 66% of 4th graders with a disability read below the basic level (Goldstein 2011). This problem becomes compounded because, according to Clark and Akerman (2006), difficulty learning to read as a child is an indicator of social exclusion as an adult and those who are the most disadvantaged are the least likely to make use of available services, including educational ones. This would mean that the 66% of 4th graders with a disability who are not reading at grade level are more likely to face social exclusion when they are older, and less likely to access the kinds of educational resources they require.

Hall, Strydom, Eagles and Hardy's findings are similar. Following a British birth-cohort of children identified with mild to severe intellectual impairment, they found that as adults only 12 per cent made use of learning opportunities over a period of eight years (2005). Unfortunately, this group is largely excluded even from literacy research. The nature and effectiveness of those resources that are available is not an issue that receives a lot of attention. A 2011 survey of 50 years of literacy research shows that only two per cent of all literacy research in the decades between 1961 and 2011 focused on adult learners (Morrison, Wilcox et al. 2011).

What the existing research indicates is that there is a link between the childhood inability to acquire literacy skills and future inability to access education and training opportunities. This then leads to obstacles to inclusion in the community across a range of domains including employment (Buddelmeyer, Leung et al. 2012). It also points to one of the advantages of community-based learning opportunities. Having the flexibility to tailor curriculum to learners' aspirations may be one of the advantages to community-based learning that happens outside of mainstream educational institutions. Community-based organisations can aim to support adults' pursuit of literacy skills simply because the opportunity is already there. When adults already involved in such organisations express a wish to work on their literacy skills, an organisation's inability or reluctance to do so becomes a squandered chance to respond to participants' needs (Moni, Jobling et al. 2011).

Adult learners have described positive learning environments as those with personalised materials, small group size, and lack of pressure. These factors are important because they can assuage fears and anxiety, which tend to hinder a person's ability to learn (Koblik, Kidd et al. 2009). Demetrior (1998) explains that small groups lend themselves to creating an atmosphere in which authority is shared so that all participants can learn from each other rather than from a single teacher. His view is that learners should be empowered not only to select and evaluate content, but to realise that they have a lot to offer. This principle is consistent with the espoused pedagogy of RAW, as the following section will explain.

# PEDAGOGY OF RAW



he following description is an exposition by Damian Le Goullon of the pedagogy that informs RAW.

As an adult learning program that aims to encourage independent thinking and social inclusion the RAW pedagogy has much in common with the interpretivist tradition as described under literacy frameworks above (see from p39). The role of the teacher is to be a facilitator of learning (rather than a director), and to provide opportunities for individual learners to acquire knowledge and construct meaning through their own activities, and through discussion, reflection, and the sharing of ideas.

RAW offers opportunities to improve reading with an eclecticism that embraces both functional and interpretivist approaches. RAW is guided by both the strongest evidence in support of a particular approach and our acquired experience of student designed learning. Such gains are generally evident in interventions that involve either explicit instruction in a relevant essential skill (direct instruction, content enhancement approaches) or ones that focus on the development of cognitive, metacognitive, or self-regulation strategies (learning strategy instruction approach). Rather than set up an artificial line of epistemological disagreement between functional/ interpretivist or facilitative/ directive approaches, RAW prefers a more pragmatic approach – at different times, different things work and it will use whatever tools the student and the tutor find useful. It is for this reason that the classes are structured to allow both explicit instruction and imaginative exploration.

The articulated pedagogy of RAW, or in other words its principles of teaching philosophy and practice, draw on both situated literacy and multiliteracy frameworks. RAW does not operate explicitly within the framework of critical pedagogy. Nevertheless, critical pedagogy informs practice and thinking in the program, especially when literacy as social inclusion becomes praxis, that is, when the learning to read and write becomes linked to social goals and when this becomes part of the agency's work.



## The RAW Learning Partnership Model

The program at RAW is person-centered and informed by a learning partnership, as the diagram below illustrates:



At the centre of the diagram above is the learning partnership between the student and the tutor. The process of building knowledge of each other; of learning potential and inclusion pathways; of mapping opportunities and building a vision for positive learning are depicted as a circle. Learning follows a semester cycle where assessment is continuous. This is a hermeneutic circle because the same themes are continually revisited but with the intention that each time they build on learning as in a spiral of growth. But at any time also note that there are ways out to new people, new places and opportunities in the community, outside of RAW. Students should not get caught in an endless mouse wheel!

Learning builds on the foundations of previous learning, particularly with adults, so the expert knowledge that the person has of their own learning is central and highly valued. The key question, therefore, for both tutor and adult learner to decide upon is “What do I/they need to know?” Each adult learner is then given the opportunity to design a program of learning that they consider will benefit themselves. Once these decisions are made the teacher’s and tutor’s role is to typically locate or design the teaching interventions that may often involve direct methods of instruction.

Mapping the student's skills and the requisite skills for social inclusion requires orientation in the learning process, which is achieved through the partnership.

The tutor's role in the partnership may be summarised as a search to answer the following questions:

- What evidence-based strategies are used to support learning (speech therapists, teachers disability support services and published articles)?
- What strategies are used by the adult learner?
- Can successful strategies be strengthened?
- Which strategies have failed?
- What skills/strengths does the adult learner use?
- What community opportunities are appropriate?

The dominant measure of progress in education has been familiarity with texts. Diane Stickler, however, recommends a student-centered approach to working with disabilities in which self-assessment, rather than formal assessment, is used to rate progress (n.d.). Jeffrey Grabill commends an approach by Linda Flower (1994) that measures success not on the accumulation of words but on "purposeful literate actions performed in social/cultural situations" (2001, p30). The RAW adult partnership involves the learning partnership in cycles of reflection in which individual performance is less of a focus. In a community literacy program fallibility is accepted by all involved in the project of creating positive change.

## **Building a vision for positive learning**

Many adults with learning difficulties have backgrounds that contain both positive and negative experiences of learning. Positive experiences need to be enhanced so learning is framed through the strengths of people rather than their disabilities, which have labeled, stigmatised and disadvantaged them through life. It is strongly believed in RAW that any negative practice is damaging. What this means is that when an issue has to be breached, then it is done with an approach that opens up learning, rather than in a fashion that will close down learning; *"I am concerned for you"* rather than *"You can't do this."*

Also, research into learning barriers often also attaches labels of disability to the learner, which are not helpful. To connect tutors to appropriate learning strategies and knowledge some assessment of a student's disability is necessary, however, these investigations should not be seen as seeking the advice of an expert because, in our the view of RAW, the expert about the experience of living with a disability is pre-eminently the adult learner. Many adults return to learning with a maturity and self-understanding that informs the best learning pathway, and RAW wants to respect that.

As a program we seek to develop positive and proactive responses to the risk of damage that people may experience when, for example, they reconnect in their learning with a painful memory. The teacher, program support worker and consultant tutor need to be on hand to respond with safety plans to manage their impact and the significant impact that they may have on concentration. At times students can be linked to support outside the class, such as counseling, to help them.

## **Australian Core Skills Framework**

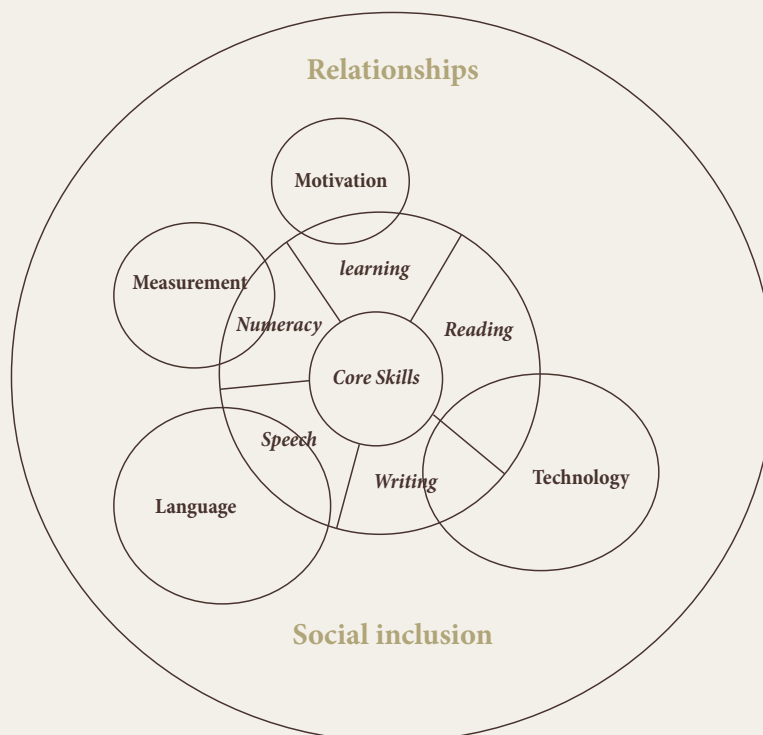
One set of standards which RAW has found useful to guide an adult learner, especially for those seeking work, is the Australian Core Skills Framework (McLean, Perkins et al. 2012).



The Core Skills Framework identifies levels of skills, knowledge and support required for a range of social roles. The five core skills are listed as reading, writing, numeracy, oral communication and learning. The RAW program, drawing on the multiliteracies framework has broadened the focus on skills to move beyond purely functional understandings to recognise that each of the above skills is a subset of a larger pool of skills. So, reading and writing are subsets of a larger field of technology. This captures for example the skills of young people who can use iPads and technology with facility while their ability to read and write is still restricted. In the same way numeracy is a functional interpretation of the ability to conceive and measure space and so it is a subset of measurement. And finally, language is a broader field than just speech and oral communication as is evident when you work with people who are not able to use these skills in a commonly accepted way, but still are able to teach others how they communicate (Alvin and Grace for example).

The following diagram situates the core literacy skills within the context of social support and the promotion of social inclusion:

### Mapping Skills Strengths and Opportunities



The emphasis on Core Skills can become problematic if people become disempowered by seeing their learning as contingent on their acquisition of these core skills. Placing a focus on the giftedness of an individual may assist instead to identify associated skills achieved by the adult learner to launch their learning.

<sup>2</sup> "We gather and share recovery stories for a number of reasons. They inform and inspire people with experience of mental health issues, carers and service providers alike. They offer hints and techniques on recovery and recognise the fact that people in recovery are 'experts in their own experience', stating very clearly that people can and do recover. They also help us learn more about the factors which help and hinder the recovery process and to better understand what recovery means." Scottish Recovery Network (2013). "Stories." Retrieved 21st November, 2013, from <http://www.scottishrecovery.net/Submit-Your-Story/stories.html>. 3

The description of 'honouring' the person originates with the Rev. Owen Strong, the founder of the project that resulted in the creation of A Place to Belong, and who used this term in conversation about the original and core ethos of the agency.

# IMPLICATIONS OF PEDAGOGY FOR PRACTICE



he research found that there is a close match between the espoused pedagogy of RAW and the pedagogy as practiced. There is a strong sense of the importance of building relationships, an understanding among tutors and the teacher that learning is dialogical, that assessment and diagnosis come after, not before spending time with students, that learning goals and learning styles need to be individually tailored if they are to engage the learner and keep them coming back each week. All of these characteristics were observed and documented during the course of the study. The fact that there was a very high retention of RAW students is a powerful indicator of how successful the teaching approach is.

In the RAW model, literacy is embedded in an agency that specialises in helping people connect to their communities of choice, and to develop natural friendships and recruit allies to help and support. To a large extent this defines the focus of literacy teaching, which is most successful when it helps people to fulfill their first order needs which are often about connectedness (Grace), respect and independence (Gabriel) and creativity (Eagle). So it is not easy to disentangle the aspects of the pedagogy of RAW that are about literacy and those that are about social inclusion. Without making that definition, however, and determining a boundary there is a risk that people remain overlong in class when they could be out and about doing successfully what they do best (a gloss on Aristotle's definition of happiness!). Damian is clear that RAW cannot achieve social inclusion aims (first order needs); it can only lead towards those first order needs and provide skills and microskills that make them more possible. Given this limitation then a rigorous pedagogy around learning to read and write is desirable. There is an irony in this, however, because the environment calls for the utmost flexibility and capacity to respond to all sorts of challenges.

## The partnership model in community

Damian as the lead teacher learnt his craft from Carmel Rosella, the original student/teacher adviser with learning disabilities. So, while it is the personal achievement of students that is the obviously measured and measurable outcome of work, RAW has become contextualised rather as a partnership achievement, and of partnership in community; it is located in community, in a building that attracts all kinds of community groups, and it is linked to an agency (A Place to Belong) that rigorously tries to link people to their community of choice. It is informed by skilled community development educators like Neil Barringham, the coordinator at A Place to Belong. The ethos of RAW encourages tutors/teachers to consider themselves as learners within community. One of the results of this broader contextualisation of education as a community achievement rather than personal attainment has led RAW, at least for itself, to extend the meaning and significance of the national measure of literacy, the Core Skills Framework, from an individualistic measure to a measure of partnership with allies and tutors in community. A focus on the rights and in particular the autonomy of students is also a key element of the pedagogy as practiced.

The student not only learns for themselves, they teach the tutor and in many cases act on community changing attitudes, perceptions and removing barriers. This can be interpreted as a form of political practice around the rights of persons with disabilities. A person with disability or learning barrier often requires support not only to navigate a personal journey through these processes but will need to influence support people to likewise develop new understandings:

- people with disabilities need the communities' attitudes and perceptions to change;
- people with disabilities will require adaption of technologies in order to acquire and integrate ideas; and
- people with disabilities will challenge our habits of mind.

It is often the people with the disability who are best placed to engineer change.

RAW works with individuals who have not had positive experiences of inclusion in schools, and have moved into adult life with undeveloped literacy and inclusion skills. It aims to create and transform the social context of adult learning positively. It moves to map out and mediate opportunities to build learning relationships in the community lives of participants.

As part of this strategy RAW is in dialogue with others in the community who wish for “a good life” for service users; their personal health, rights and ambitions are managed in partnership. However, adult learners with intellectual disabilities often struggle to participate meaningfully in meetings, and the inequities of power involved in creating a vision of change needs to be acknowledged. This is one of the areas where a multiliteracy approach comes in useful, acknowledging people's individual literacies (as suggested in the case studies in this report). Multiliteracy approaches, which respect the ways which people have developed to communicate, helps to level the power differential. Nevertheless, tutors often need to assist the adult learner to adapt the planning process to include their feelings and aspirations. Personal choice may have been contextualised by past experience of incapacity rather than informed understandings of potential. Sometimes the choices that people have learnt to make for themselves go against social norms, and here the tension discussed above that is highlighted by Social Role Valorization theory is particularly important and sensitive to negotiate.

In the end, people are judged by their adherence to normative values and so one of the key tasks that may arise in community education is helping people choose how they want to be as a person, while understanding well the impacts and effects of that, should it involve eccentricities or idiosyncratic behaviour. Being your own person and yet enjoying mainstream community is the challenge in this case. Most people negotiate this well when they have well-developed capacities, capabilities and resources, and this is a particularly valuable area to which RAW contributes.



# POLICY



he implications for socially inclusive learning practice have been outlined in the previous section for practitioners and people in the community interested in establishing community-based literacy groups. The emphasis has been on the people that make it work and the way in which they work. This section (succinctly named “Policy” to allow a certain poetic alliteration in titles) addresses the implications of RAW at a macro level, though individual stories are still used to illustrate these structural implications.

There are three aspects of policy that will be addressed:

- a) To outline the implications of socially inclusive learning to organisational structure and settings;
- b) To outline the implications of having a more refined and “thicker” version of understanding social inclusion. RAW works in an arena where outcomes are sometimes able to be clearly measured (for example, “he has a job now”), but more often involve a more diffuse and less clearly observed increase or decrease in skills around capacity and control. These are sometimes considered to need qualitative evaluation and are therefore hard to measure except by narrative (Schachter 2010). To support the work of RAW a tool has been developed which provides quasi-quantitative indicators around an enhanced and wider interpretation of social inclusion. This tool is included as Appendix 3; and
- c) Finally, as a consequence of the literature review around literacy and social policy, which is attached as Appendix 2, to highlight that community-based literacy training is nowhere to be seen on the horizon of social policy and as a consequence is unfunded and unloved by governments. This is not necessarily a bad thing, because it is able to maintain its roots in community and escape the debilitating effects of outcome measurement. Nevertheless, it is an area of social policy that can have important connection effects for the most disadvantaged and excluded people in the Australian community.





# SOCIALLY INCLUSIVE LEARNING: IMPLICATIONS FOR ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE



he model of socially inclusive learning that emerges from the research works at three levels:

- 1) The first and most important level is individual. To quote from the Community Mental Health Practice Framework put together in 2012 by mental health leaders in Queensland, including Neil Barringham, the person comes first.

“I see the person as leading their own recovery journey and my role is learning from them what needs to be done and how.” (Community Mental Health Workforce Leaders Group Queensland 2012)

In practice the person is identifying their own goals around social connection and the service is providing support. A Place to Belong appears to be committed to this principle of person-centred practice (Barringham and Barringham 2002) and it is evident in the RAW program.

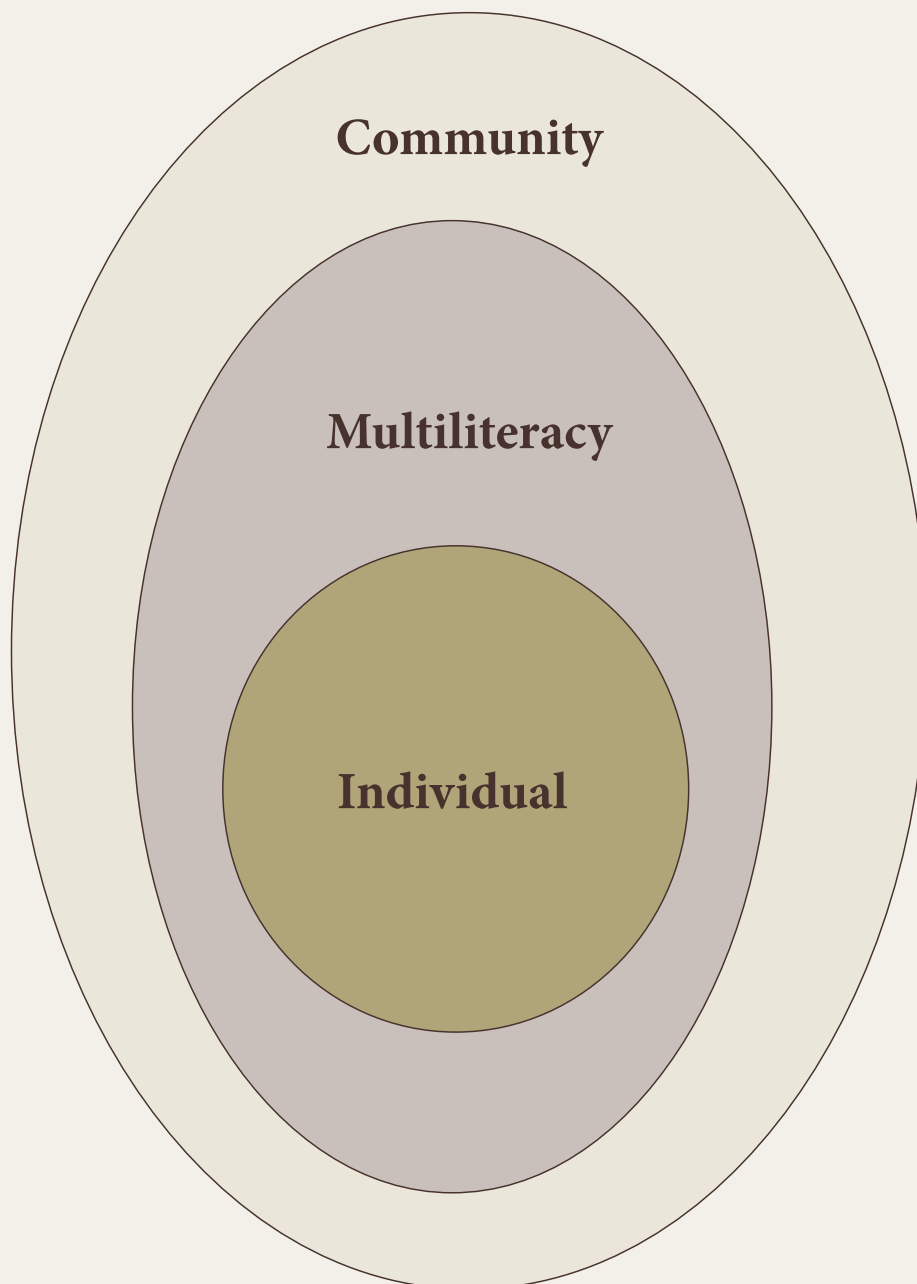
- 2) The RAW program materialises a second level of social inclusion, where the connection between literacy and social inclusion is worked through as people “self-direct” their learning. It might have been another program, such as pre-employment training, which was used, but in this case the serendipitous connection, due to Carmel Rosella choosing A Place to Belong as the vehicle for her project, is literacy. It is serendipitous because, as we have demonstrated above, literacy is a central factor in social inclusion.

Because people can move from literacy to the community connection arm of A Place to Belong with relative ease if required, their control over the process is, at least in theory, consistent. In the period of observation, three people were provided support to achieve their inclusion aims, outside of their work in RAW. While A Place to Belong is not directly an organisation focusing on community development, it is nevertheless working at many different levels to propagate principles of autonomy and mutuality in the lives of people with mental health and other issues, and this work inevitably has a political and community building character (personal communication Neil Barringham).

- 3) The individual is interacting with, and RAW is embedded in, the third level of work. This is a systemic level (engagement with community groups and agencies, government organisations and Anglicare) with, at the same time, a fine focus on individuals. The creative ambiguity of being both system-wide and individual will manifest in many ways. There are a number of notable examples of people who have been provided intensive support over many years who work as presenters with Neil Barringham in talking through the process and results of their lives. They help to show how inclusion

works in practice and at the same time their relationships with A Place to Belong are on public show and hence are a model for respectful person-centered practice. This has implications for the development of agencies' systems and organisations. Simultaneously they are acquiring a number of valued social roles in the process, as community educators, professional trainers and as powerful advocates.

The RAW social inclusion model therefore, is an embedded model that looks something like this:



# IMPLICATIONS FOR UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL INCLUSION: DIVERSE OUTCOMES AND PATHWAYS



number of former students were interviewed during the course of the research. These interviews revealed a great deal about how far people had come in their literacy and in developing other capabilities and competencies. Some individual outcomes were obvious and tangible, such as getting employment, stable housing or starting a TAFE course; other outcomes were more intangible, such as gaining greater confidence, having a clearer sense of purpose and stronger social networks, autonomy and connections.

In our introduction to the framework of social inclusion the dominant model of social inclusion around housing, education, civic duty and most importantly employment was described as a “thin” or “narrow” version. Here we want to address some of the stories to illustrate that social inclusion as an evolving concept needs to be enhanced with a broader range of goals and objectives including the acquisition of wellbeing and the learning of specific skills in such things as self-advocacy and the self-management of mental health.

## Accessing employment

A very common global framing of social inclusion and connectedness in government policies is in terms of employability and paid employment. The current Australian Social Services minister, Kevin Andrews expresses it simply as “...we know work is the best form of welfare” (Karvelas 21st January 2014). Employment gives access to income which may be above the Disability Support Pension, or which will supplement that income if the work is part-time. In a market economy, more money (at least up to a point) gives people the opportunity for greater material wellbeing and an improved lifestyle. In terms of social inclusion its most obvious advantages are the access that employment gives to social networks, to entertainment and to conversation. A real job, rather than training programs, improves mental health (Huber, Lechner et al. 2009). However, it is also the case that a ‘bad job’ (e.g. little autonomy and control or poor wages and conditions) can harm someone’s mental wellbeing (Butterworth, Leach et al. 2011).

Meaningful paid work can provide structure to the day and get people out of their home. For example one student commented that when he had a job “I wasn’t depressed because I had no time to be.” A less obvious advantage but one that is deeply significant in a society that values paid employment and rates peoples’ social status by the level of that employment is that being an employee provides a valued social role.

Whether these advantages are clearly enunciated, or simply in the consciousness of people, the goal of employment is clear for some of the RAW students. For many people with mental health issues and other disabilities, however, the option of paid employment can remain a distant goal. This is tacitly acknowledged through the administrative process of making it harder for people to stay on the Disability Support Pension (DSP). A key thrust of contemporary policy is to move people onto the Newstart Allowance, which requires them to actively seek work or approved training. The logic is that those who remain on the DSP are genuinely unable to work, even if they should want to. Many of the students who come to RAW are in this category.

RAW students are not mandated to look for work, and there is a variety of attitudes that people have. For at least five students (Alvin, Deanna, Nerissa, Jacob, Marty) employment was a clearly stated goal. For some of the students work is not a goal; Tristan actually stated that they did not want to work. For others (such as Grace), their stated needs are about achieving normative standards of living and work is not even on the horizon. At least one person, Gavin, stated that he did not have any ambition to work in a normal job and was happy with his sheltered workshop job at low pay. The reason he gave was that he did not think he could do any other work. Alvin left the sheltered workshop because he found it so boring and is now being helped by A Place to Belong to find better paying work. Finally, while the research was being conducted Marty found work on his own initiative but is using the support of RAW to learn the vocabulary of the commercial kitchen.

A number of people, therefore, actually see work as one of their goals but the obstacles presented by their mental health put that goal at some distance. Clearly then, the advantages of paid employment in terms of money, social connectedness and a valued social role is meaningful for many, however, paradoxically the narrow range of discourse around a 'thin' version of social inclusion leads to the exclusion of those most disadvantaged in the job market because they are unable to access the training and living supports that they need to even stand a chance at being competitive. Many RAW students have been homeless at some time; without a place to base oneself and being itinerant in finding shelter on a daily basis, it becomes nearly impossible to establish the routine that is required to find a job in a very competitive market.

Looking more closely at the students of RAW it becomes obvious that their connectedness to the community and to employment cannot be simplistically reduced to a checklist of items, for example achieving a Certificate Level 3 in some skill, being connected to an employment agency for people with disabilities and doing some volunteer work. To even come close to these standard requirements for the disabled job seeker many skills and microskills of living have to be acquired or re-acquired, including literacy. The failure to acknowledge this need means that people with mental health and other issues may always be excluded from employment, despite their wish to join the labour force.

For the people who want to work, RAW provides technical support in literacy for employment. Jacob, for example had a job as a cleaner working in a motorbike café, where he sometimes assisted in motorbike repair, and so had to write receipts for repair jobs done. "I could actually write receipts that are – so that people could understand my writing and also I was writing notes to my boss with better handwriting." Discovering a career is a process that involves exploration and mistakes. Carmel discovered a career through her love of learning. For her, the act of acquiring literacy skills gave her employment and a job. Others struggle to enunciate or unravel what it is that they should be doing.

The core insight that emerges from RAW is that social inclusion, whether it involves employment or not, requires a range of skills and micro-skills that need to be taken on and utilised before progress can be made towards achieving long term goals.

RAW reveals angles and views on social inclusion that illustrate that it is not only about the acquisition of a list of desired options such as housing and a job, but is a wider-ranging and a more subtle subject. The 'thin' version of social inclusion implicitly accepts, for example, that being employed gives important community benefits, but avoids probing deeper into the complex associations that help to explain why. In this version it is sufficient that you have a job; the rest is considered self-evident. The acquisition of a valued social role may be even more important to a person than the earning of money. And the acquisition of a valued social role may contribute to a feeling of confidence, hope and power in people who have had these stripped from them. Once again, this may have more important subjective significance than having more money. This is not to speak of the reciprocal need for confidence, hope and power in even being able to find a job.



There are other aspects of social inclusion that are completely passed over in the 'thin' version of social inclusion, perhaps because they are very hard to measure objectively, such as a growth in the ability to activate creativity and engage with others in creative acts which allow people to build their networks of friendship and support. Social inclusion has many layers in its 'thick' version. Beneath these suggested components underlie the microskills, which includes various literacies that enable a person to live an ordered existence and to participate in community activities. The following examples illustrate the significance of taking on a more nuanced view of social inclusion in assessing outcomes. They are not meant to be exhaustive but are issues that emerged from the research project: Social inclusion and valued social roles; self-expression and power; creativity and the acquisition of the microskills that allow one to access mainstream community.

Nerissa exemplifies how someone with advanced intellectual skills may still lack the tools and skills not only to access service and commodities, but to avoid being "ripped off" by them. In one of the tutor's words, *"bureaucracy is just another form of literacy"*.

Nerissa was abandoned by her family as a young teenager and was unable to complete her education. While at school her dyslexia was not identified and so she suffered an identity as a 'stupid' person, and often avoided lessons and school. In her youth and early adulthood she also experienced a succession of truly horrible episodes of abuse which left her with post traumatic stress disorder. Despite these disadvantages she had two children who she brought up for many years in the bush living off the land. Her knowledge of gardening, the environment, native bushlore and indigenous ways is deep, but because of her mental troubles and homelessness she suffered the tragic loss of having her children taken out of her care and put into that of her mother. For many years she has tried unsuccessfully to be reunited, but has been frustrated by her family who consider her 'mad'. When Nerissa first came across A Place to Belong, she said that she felt she was being listened to for the first time. She joined RAW and addressed her literacy needs and is now an ex-student of RAW who is receiving social inclusion support from A Place to Belong to further her studies. Last year Nerissa successfully completed her first semester of a Degree in Natural Therapies, with a Distinction in Biology, and this year her son took the initiative to reconnect with her. At the time of writing they are planning to live together again. Taking on the role of tertiary student opens up the possibility of acquiring a profession and even more valued roles.

Another former student with the West End group, Gavin, spent most of his early life living in a hostel. Through his work over six years with RAW he developed the idea of living independently until he was able to move into his own flat. He expressed in interview that he has had a huge jump in his happiness through this move. One of the things that has happened is that he is now seeing much more of his aunt and brother who would not visit him in the hostel. He has family, a sheltered job that he is not ready to move out of, his independence and a network. These things have increased his confidence. Damian noted that his bodily posture has changed and he is now beginning to provide leadership, by advising friends who want to move out of institutional settings. Among the nuances of social inclusion that are observed here is that through gaining in confidence the student has acquired a barely-glimpsed but nevertheless significant increase in role-status. He been able to move from a devalued living environment (a hostel for the very poor) to his own space and can provide others with advice about that. In moving away from people he has also gained a valued social role as an independent tenant, and is able to determine his relationships rather than have them forced on him. Some of these gains are subtle, but in terms of the person's quality of experience, they are very real.

When Gavin joined RAW Damian reported that he did not have a perceptible disadvantage and was functioning at a year 10 level. Nevertheless he desperately wanted to stay in the group, making excuses that his punctuation needed work, and then that he wanted to learn another language.

In fact, his writing was far clearer than his speech, and Damian recognised this as a factor of strength. The student was being bullied at the hostel and controlled by an abusive hostel manager. However, he was under clinical care after a previous breakdown and his clinical manager was very concerned that any change of living arrangements would lead to serious problems. Because of his difficulties in expressing himself verbally Damian supported him to write up his arguments. Every time that he experienced a bullying episode, Damian encouraged him to write about it and to submit it to the clinical manager until she became convinced too that a change in living arrangements was necessary. Gavin organised a meeting of a number of stakeholders and conducted a meeting where he presented himself well. The decision came to refer him to an independent living program where he excelled and demonstrated his ability to support himself. Previously he was unable to buy CDs or new clothes. Now, when he appears at RAW he comes to show his branded T-shirts and new music, signifiers of his new role status.

## Accessing mainstream education

Damian looks at mainstream education wherever possible as an outcome, but in most cases the people who come to RAW are not well-equipped to undergo rigid curricula. It may be asked why the mainstream classes such as literacy through TAFE should be considered rigid. One of the former, Maxine, who was originally a student but who is now employed as a Teaching Assistant, commented:

*“I tried doing literacy through TAFE, but it certainly was not – because you had to fit in their box, and I just didn’t quite fit there. But I found with the group here that is that they don’t squeeze you into a box. You work at your own pace and it certainly takes that pressure off and it makes it – it’s a lot better learning environment.”*

Nerissa said that she was able to get more intensive and time-relevant support through having the program embedded in the community:

*“... I was living at a place - like when I - from living in my car I wound up coming here just for support service and then I got a place in Toowong and was riding my bike over here for probably six months. Every week for six months and then due to circumstances in the house finishing I wound up homeless again and that’s when some of the people here - a volunteer here at Place to Belong said look, there’s a spare room - this was just after the floods - there’s a spare room in a volunteer’s house next door. The support workers and volunteers next door, which was - and so I moved in.*

*It was temporary but that was great because it meant that I was right here every day, so I could come over every day and re-practice what I’d been learning just that one day a week in class. I could still come over and if Damien was around or Christine was around or Carmel, one of the other people, were around they could just keep guiding me and go, yeah, that’s what you did, this is how you go about this.”*

Gavin commented on the stress of learning in regulated groups:

*“Interviewer: If you were doing this in TAFE, it would be three days a week.*

*Gavin: Yes, but the only problem with TAFE is it’s more stressful. If you have learning difficulties you may struggle because they put pressure on you. There’s only one tutor for 20 and all that. But they should have reading and writing groups like RAW at least three days a week.”*

Some students may need to develop the confidence to be able to sustain a demanding schedule of attendance at courses. Another young student, Bram, for example, may want to do a mainstream course in animation. He is a young man who displays skills far above that of his tutors with computers. However, he does not appear motivated to attend regularly. His lack of motivation means that his learning is interrupted and partial, highlighting the point raised earlier that motivation is an essential prerequisite for social inclusion. A paternalistic approach to motivation would entail giving the student some external incentive, such as a loss of benefits; however, in his case such an approach would be counterproductive. His family is comfortable and it is likely that he would simply stay at home. This student revealed that his RAW classes were his only community connection, apart from visits to the city centre where he did not reveal his activity, but gave the impression that he only observes. He watches a lot of TV and plays computer games on his own.

In contradiction to these vignettes, a support worker commented about another young man who was an ex-student of RAW and is now receiving support to learn skills to access community from A Place to Belong. “He was learning to read, but he wasn’t learning to live”. This young man declined to participate in the research, and so it is not possible to explore the reasons for this statement in depth, but the comment illuminates that Damian’s claim that “literacy is inclusion” has to be understood rhetorically, to position our understanding in a radically different way. Literacy teaching is critical to inclusion, but it needs to be supplemented by explicit work at making the connections in order to succeed. However the link between literacy training and social inclusion is missing in Australia, as was noted in the introduction.

In the case of the young man just mentioned, a decision was made that learning to read and write did not connect with his “first order” needs, which are much more about doing things in community. Trying to push him to develop literacy skills was not working. He “exited” RAW in order to engage with those needs. While all the stories of students of RAW have been used in this study to support the argument for the interaction of literacy and social inclusion, this example remains an exception. However, in a paradoxical way it also supports the argument, because the linkage between RAW and A Place to Belong allowed a transition from classes to inclusion work, with a continuity of mutual knowledge and trust.

In summary, while accessing that mainstream education and employment remains important, even critical, for social inclusion, an over-emphasis on employment as the goal of social inclusion can paradoxically lead to exclusion of people with complex issues and battling many obstacles including mental health problems. There need to be other avenues and pathways that people can take to reach these goals. Community-based education is one of these.

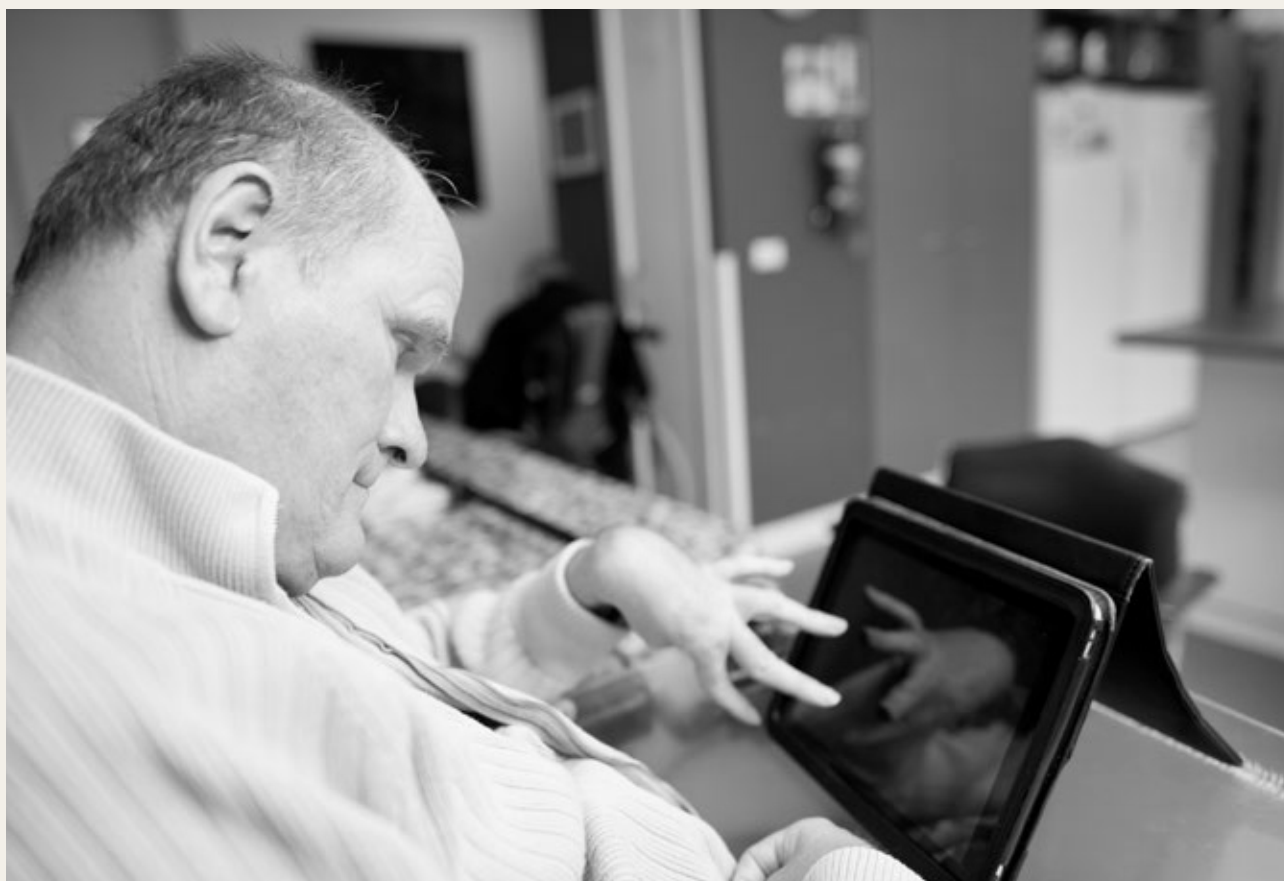
What emerges from these examples of different outcomes is a wide and subtle reading of what social inclusion is about. Clearly they are embedded in peoples’ lives and so a reading with another group of people will surely bring up other themes. To summarise, what emerges, however, from this study includes and engages with:

- intrinsic motivation;
- gaining power over one’s life (both big and small changes);
- gaining power and control over one’s mental health;
- acquisition of valued roles, respectful recognition;
- narrative and voice and self-advocacy;
- connection with family and friends, and
- the opportunity to develop creative, employment or education pathways.

What these outcomes also reveal is the connection between first order and second order needs, and how responding to them will activate these critical if subtle elements and supports of inclusion. What becomes apparent in the stories discussed throughout the report is that people approach the opportunity to learn to read and write with different motivations. Sometimes people come to classes asking simply to “read and write”. That is a perfectly legitimate request of a reading and writing course, however it is an acknowledged principle of adult learning that adults want their learning to be linked to their lives and what they are trying to achieve. It is also good pedagogical practice because learning will come more easily if it is associated with a need to learn. In the stories above what we see are people coming for literacy, but what emerges is a desire, want or motivation for a ‘better’ life. For people in the community who are privileged with normative lives, improving literacy and knowledge through education and independent study has an equivalent motivation, with the qualification that they are usually not struggling with obstacles on the scale of people who link to RAW.

### **Implications for social inclusion: expanded indicators of social inclusion**

The obstacles experienced by people with mental health issues, other disabilities and with a lack of developed literacy skills, means that without appropriate support they are at risk of being among the most excluded people in Australia. This study depicts a learning environment full of ambiguities and innovation in terms of facing this challenge, and perhaps the most significant observation is that a robust linkage between literacy training and active social inclusion work is very useful in making progress. At the same time the ambiguities and challenges mean that teachers, tutors, the person supported and their families may struggle to see that progress. This means also that government funders may also not be able to see the usefulness of the work. We were requested to develop some preliminary indicators that covered both the domains of literacy and its connection to social inclusion, so that stakeholders could see what had been achieved. These indicators are included as Appendix 3.





# CONCLUSION



This report has documented the advantages and challenges of the model of ‘socially inclusive learning’ practiced by RAW. This is a model where the exploration of first and second order needs can take place in a safe and supportive space, where people can build their literacy skills and can work in partnership with others on the articulation and achievement of life changing goals.

RAW is a small community-based program doing remarkable work. The teachers and the tutors do not shy away from some difficult problems. The flexibility, good humour and commitment from the teacher and the tutors and the staff of A Place to Belong who interact with the program is evident. So, what can a small program like this teach the wider community? It reinforces the close link between literacy and social inclusion. In practice, the streams of literacy training and social inclusion work are often siloed. TAFE provides training in reading and writing skills but it is left to other agencies to do the work of social inclusion. What is missed in this approach is the gestalt of shared understandings and knowledge about these deeply connected needs.

The review of literacy policy in Australia (Appendix 2) demonstrates that at the national level there are only two policy paradigms that are recognised – literacy for paid employment and literacy for children. Community based literacy programs, which have demonstrated potential to support adults with mental health and complex issues are not part of this picture. In one way, there is a strange benefit to this situation of attracting so little money as the agencies can get on and do their work in ways that are not driven by ‘top down’ narrow policy objectives to deliver pre-determined outcomes within rigid timeframes. The obvious disadvantage of course, is that these agencies are always struggling for recognition, and for financial support.

This report has argued for a “thicker” vision of social inclusion which is essential for people who have lost a great deal, some of whom had even lost the capability to articulate their story. Re-authoring these lives and generating new capabilities for a different narrative is a very powerful form of transformative learning. Gaining new literacies frees people from a burden that often remains covered by various coping strategies. What programs like RAW do, in the words of the 20th Century sociologist C.W. Mills (2000), is turn ‘personal troubles’ into public issues where the individual and members of the local community come to accept some level of shared responsibility for addressing an enduring, but often silent, injustice.

# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1 Methodology



he methodology for the project was qualitative in nature, involving participant observation and semi-structured interviews with former and present students, volunteer tutors and the teacher. A literature review on the recovery model, literacy and inclusive learning was also conducted prior to inform the findings. The core research practice

was a series of observation sessions of lessons in two sites carried out from July to September 2013. Ten sessions were observed in West End and eight sessions in Mt Gravatt. In these sessions participant observer researchers sat in on the main introductory sessions, various one-on-one teaching and also the various group summary sessions. In-depth notes were taken and an effort made to obtain a 'thick' description of what happens in RAW learning sessions.

Alongside the observations semi-structured interviews were conducted with the teacher, Damian Le Goullon, with two teaching support staff, a number of tutors and students (questions attached as Appendix 4). These interviews were recorded and most were transcribed. Ten interviews were conducted with current students, five with ex-students, one with a member of the teaching staff who had also been an ex-student, one with a tutor individually and one with four tutors as a group. While it was hoped to connect with up to twenty ex-students, they proved difficult to locate and to make times to interview, and success depended largely on them dropping into the interview site and consenting to be interviewed.

The researchers conducted a thematic analysis of the text of these conversations drawing out the principal themes, which were then explored using the recorded observational data. Reflecting the participant methodology, the research observers recorded their observations and thoughts as they went, and reflected on them as part of the analysis. In some cases they took them back to the teachers and tutors to test the validity of the analysis. The teaching team was open to making changes as the research progressed and during the research a number of suggestions and proposals were made for immediate improvements, discussed later in the report. All suggestions were considered by the team leading to the development of a tutor-learning package. A group interview and feedback session was held with the participants, learning coordinators and tutors to discuss the key findings in Dec 2013.



## Appendix 2 Literature review on literacy policy in Australia

This section covers the policy background and academic literature on literacy and social inclusion and it provides important context for interpreting the approach to literacy and social inclusion adopted by RAW.

### The progress of literacy policy in Australia

Adult literacy provision in Australia before the 1990s was ad hoc. During the 1970s there was a dawning awareness of the need for adult literacy, but systemic recognition did not come until deliberate strategies adopted by literacy activists in the late 1980s repositioned adult literacy in terms of economic necessity and social justice (Searle 2000, Wickert 2001). Language policy arose through three initially complementary streams: The mobilisation of language professionals caused by removing the requirement of a foreign language for entry into university in 1968; the role of ethnic and Indigenous groups in advocating for their languages and the trade effects of the UK turning towards the EU in the 1970s with the subsequent reorientation of Australia towards Asia, marked by the beginning of the “Australia is part of Asia” discourse and the promotion of Asian languages in schools and universities (Lo Bianco 2001, p14).

Joseph Lo Bianco, a noted advocate of multicultural and indigenous language policy in Australia was recruited to develop the first National Policy on Languages (NPL) in 1987 following a Senate report (1987). The NPL focused mostly on English as a Foreign and Second Language, and the provision of support for ethnic (“community”) languages and indigenous languages, but pointed out in passing that there had been “inadequate past attempts to tackle adult illiteracy levels” (op cit, p10). It proposed the establishment of an Early Literacy In-service Course and the Basic Learning in Primary Schools program, as well as a campaign to attempt to improve levels of adult literacy in 1988 (op cit). Funding was first provided to the Technical and Further Education providers (TAFE) to deliver adult literacy programs. \$1.4m was also provided to non-government education providers (Castleton and McDonald 2002, p4).

The coalition of support around social justice imperatives started to break down with the economic restructuring initiatives of the Hawke-Keating Governments, and directly as a result of the education reforms of the then Minister for Education John Dawkins. Dawkins was inspired by the newly emergent OECD human capital theorisation which framed literacy as an economic variable (Lo Bianco 2001,p16). The changed focus came as a realisation that global competitiveness depended on an educated workforce, and that an educated workforce depended on literacy and numeracy capability, heralding a shift from social purposes to literacy for productivity (Castleton and McDonald 2002,p5). A milestone marker was the 1990 International Literacy Year followed by a revised language policy the *Australian Language and Literacy Policy (ALLP)* (Department of Employment Education and Training 1991). Dawkins broke free of the multicultural lobby represented by the Australian Advisory Council on Languages and Multicultural Education (AACLAME) in developing this policy. He adopted his department’s view (Department of Employment Education and Training or DEET) that the NPL had not addressed community rates of illiteracy in Australian English and that an approach which coordinated a variety of programs was required (Brock 2001). An unprecedented \$720m was given to the TAFE sector to up-skill the workforce. By 1994 the budget had grown to \$1 billion (Castleton and McDonald 2002,p5). The ALLP dropped the emphasis on second language acquisition, refocusing on Australian English, a position that reflected Dawkin’s view that Australia was monolingual (Brock 2001, p62). Community languages began to be seen as a problem rather than a resource with a shift towards an “English literacy first” ideology (Lo Bianco 2001, p15).

Building on the ALLP in 1993 State and Federal authorities inaugurated the *National Collaborative Adult English Language and Literacy Strategy* (NCAELLS). This strategy aligned literacy training around the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) (Castleton and McDonald 2002, p7) and the National Framework in Adult English Language, Literacy and Numeracy Competence. This latter framework provided competency indicators around adult literacy (op.cit., p8), which have subsequently developed into the current Australian Core Skills Framework for Assessment in the Language Literacy and Numeracy program.

The incoming Coalition Government led by Prime Minister John Howard in 1996 continued and intensified the directions established by Labor. The one-language approach proved congenial to this government, who favoured a discourse around the homogeneity of the nation. In addition, the then Minister for Education, David Kemp favoured addressing illiteracy by going to the root or the beginning – a ‘illiteracy eradication’ approach directed at intervention in primary education (Lo Bianco 2001, p18). Targeted groups of disadvantaged people with literacy deficits were able to access training through the Jobtrain program (Castleton and McDonald 2002, p4).

Eventually literacy training became mandatory under the Coalition Government’s mutual obligation framework, which spelled out obligations that had to be fulfilled in order for people to gain access to and maintain benefits (Lo Bianco 2001, p24, Castleton and McDonald 2002, p9).

The International Survey of Adult Literacy occurred at the same time as the incoming Coalition Government and highlighted that more than 80% of Australia’s population was functioning at a level 3 or less in Prose, Document and Quantitative literacy (enabling people to cope with many printed materials found in daily life, but not with high proficiency). Only 300,000 were found to function at Level 5, the highest level of literacy (Castleton and McDonald 2002, pp10-11).

The decades since the 1990s have seen a growing awareness and lobbying around the links between literacy and productivity, and a hardening in the discourse that literacy is about the economy. Surveys, inquiries and reports have been produced, highlighting both the links and the failure of the Australian working population to measure up to standards. Among these are the 2006 Adult Literacy and Life Skill Survey conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics that demonstrated that there has been no significant improvement since the 1996 IALS in the numbers of people functioning below level 3; a Productivity Commission working paper in 2010 (Shomos 2010); the “*No More Excuses*” report of the Industry Skills Councils (ISC) which called for increased investment in Vocation and Employment Training to support 7-8 million adults in the workforce (2011), and most recently the 2013 National Workforce Development Strategy by the Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency, “*Future Focus*”.

Future Focus states:

“Our modeling shows...around 50 per cent of Australians have been assessed as having literacy and/or numeracy scores below the minimum standard needed to manage the complex demands of life and work...This is not a marginal issue. It is a huge challenge of mainstream Australian and it is constraining individual opportunity and economic development. Building LLN skills will be critical to increasing labour force participation and transitioning to a more productive, higher skilled economy (Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency 2013, pp83-84).”

Within the policy frame of “literacy equals employability” there is acknowledgement that literacy is needed for a broader life than the workplace, and for finding a place in the local and national community, however this is not a core focus. The Australian Bureau of Statistics survey of 2006,



for example, did not take data from residents of hostels, considering it transitory accommodation. In reality however, the residents of hostels are frequently long-stay people who may have impediments that directly affect their literacy and inclusion in the local community, let alone in finding a job (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006).

If employability is one significant policy theme, then the failure of schools to address the problem is another dominating stream in the policy debate. The concern with the performance of schools is widespread and underlies the bipartisan monitoring and reporting approach, which is encapsulated in the contentious development of the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). NAPLAN began at the same time there was a shift towards the link between literacy and productivity. As early as 1990 the then NSW premier Nick Greiner began statewide testing of students in literacy and numeracy. Within a decade all states and territories followed suit and in 2005 the then federal education minister Brendan Nelson (Coalition Government) began an investigation into the possibility of common national tests (Department of Education Science and Training 2005). This continued in 2006 when it was agreed to introduce common tests as NAPLAN. The incoming Labor Government in 2007 under the Minister for Education Julie Gillard, continued and expanded the policy (Barry McGaw Chair of the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority 2012).

Associated with the concern with the education of children, has been a movement away from constructivist epistemologies and teaching theory towards a ‘no-nonsense’ functional pedagogy. This movement parallels the much higher-level shift from education for the development of the whole person, to education for employability and productivity that has been charted above. The impact of the debate across constructivism and functionalism is felt across the broader framework of literacy policy in Australia; literacy as social capital competes with literacy as human capital. This expresses itself practically through a deep concern for declining literacy standards among children and employable adults, and the methods to address that. Since the 1970s literacy has had two dominant faces: firstly the fear that Australian children and adults are lacking in requisite levels of literacy and numeracy (see for example, the 1996 International Survey of Adult Literacy and the 2006 Adult Literacy and Lifeskills survey) and, since the 1990s, most dominantly the imperative that frames literacy and numeracy as a factor in the economic productivity of the nation (Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency, p12). The implications for people of disability or who have been otherwise marginalised, who have low prospects of being utilised productively in the market, is profound – they receive little attention in inquiries into literacy standards in Australia.

The 2005 National Enquiry into the Teaching of Literacy concluded that:

“The Inquiry found strong evidence that a whole-language approach to the teaching of reading on its own is not in the best interests of children, particularly those experiencing reading difficulties. Moreover, where there is unsystematic or no phonics instruction, children’s literacy progress is significantly impeded, inhibiting their initial and subsequent growth in reading accuracy, fluency, writing, spelling and comprehension. Much curriculum design, content, teaching and teacher preparation seems to be based, at least implicitly, on an educational philosophy of constructivism (an established theory of knowing and learning rather than a theory of teaching). Yet the Inquiry found there is a serious lack of supporting evidence for its effectiveness in teaching children to read.” (Department of Education Science and Training 2005)

The report however is ultimately dismissive of constructivism without seeking a deeper assimilation, and quotes approvingly:

“...We largely ignore generations of professional experience and knowledge in favour of a slick postmodern theoretical approach, most often characterized by the misuse of the notion of constructivism.” (Department of Education Science and Training 2005, p13)

The concern with the ultimately ideological adoption of a technique is that the knowledge available which evolves under alternative epistemologies gets lost. So, for example:

“One of the greatest threats to teaching approaches informed by multiple literacies and new literacy studies is the move internationally in the US, the UK, Australia and New Zealand, and others to more instrumental forms.” (Wyse, Jones et al. 2013, p34).

The teaching of adult literacy is therefore embedded in a national policy environment that frames literacy as a productivity variable, whether it is the failure of schools to develop children as productive units in the economy, or in the direct attention of getting unemployed adults into jobs. A broader, less instrumental view of literacy has been marginalised in contemporary policy settings for adult literacy. This marginalisation has significant impacts on the teaching of literacy in the community sector.

## **Literacy policy and community**

Adult literacy training in Australia is currently provided through the Skills for Education and Employment (SEE) program previously known as the Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program (LLNP) and the Workplace English Language and Literacy Program (Department of Industry 2013). Provision of literacy training is through the TAFE and private provider system and, in Queensland, community literacy is delivered by a range of providers; however, it is also generally linked to the need to develop vocational skills. The “Great skills real opportunities” education reform introduced by the Queensland Government in 2013 promises the delivery of foundation skills, including language, literacy and numeracy training and other workplace preparation skills as a critical component of the guarantee to provide Certificate 3 training to all school graduates (Department of Education Training and Employment 2013) to empower them to apply for jobs.

Funding for community-based literacy learning in Australia, supported by such COAG declarations as the Ministerial Declaration on Adult Community Education (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations 2008), which supports the role of community education, remains focused on literacy for vocational purposes. This approach risks excluding people whose capabilities for work are handicapped by the disabilities caused by learning and other impairments, and by attendant social disadvantage such as homelessness or poverty, and who may never work in paid employment. In 1996, the International Adult Literacy Survey adopted a broader and more generous definition of literacy that included connections of literacy skills with social inclusion (Castleton and McDonald 2002, p11-12), and noted the importance of the voluntary sector for people who might not enroll in adult education:

The voluntary sector can be extremely important in the delivery of adult education – especially in reaching out to adults with low literacy skills who might otherwise not enroll in adult education. Participation in the voluntary sector can enhance and build literacy skills, while promoting the development of civic skills and fostering social cohesion in the knowledge economy (Castleton and McDonald 2002, p13).

Community based literacy programs can therefore serve multiple functions, which is in line with a multi-dimensional conception of literacy.

## APPENDIX 3 Indicators of social inclusion

The obstacles experienced by people with mental health issues, other disabilities and with a lack of developed literacy skills, means that without appropriate support they are at risk of being among the most excluded people in Australia. This study depicts a learning environment full of ambiguities and innovation in terms of facing this challenge, and perhaps the most significant observation is that a robust linkage between literacy training and active social inclusion work is very useful in making progress. At the same time the ambiguities and challenges mean that both teachers, tutors, the person supported and their families may struggle to see that progress. This means also that administering bodies and government funders may also not be able to see the usefulness of the work. We were requested by the RAW team to develop some indicators that were measurable and that covered both the domains of literacy and its connection to social inclusion, so that stakeholders could see what had been achieved.

It was recognised that the Australian Core Skills Framework (McLean, Perkins et al 2012) provides an appropriate set of measures for literacy and numeracy. They are linked to the Australian Quality Framework and therefore ultimately to Vocational and Technical Education (VET) and employment. Many of the students of RAW, however would rate as Level 1 in this framework, and after a period of study would continue to rate at this level. The ACSF acknowledges that a person's achievements at this level requires support, which is congruent with RAW pedagogy which suggests that a person's achievements should be read in partnership, that is, as the achievement of a core unit of two people or more (see Pedagogy, p52). Given this limitation, progress against this Framework can be measured by the achievement of specific objectives decided by the person being supported, e.g. to be able to read changing bus numbers, or to be able to read the first three letters of street signs. The quantitative aspect of this measurement is the achievement of the number of objectives, however quality can also be measured by the speed (i.e. comfort) with which a person becomes able to do these skills.

Level 1 ACSF Objectives	Achieved: Yes/No/In progress	Comfort level: 3 – Fast enough for goal 2 – Takes too long but can be done 1 – Not able yet
1. To read bus signals	Yes	3 – Able to read bus signal in 5 seconds
2. To read the first three letters of street signs	Yes/In progress	3 – Takes time but speed is not essential

Nevertheless the ACSF Framework is not equipped to identify some of the more subtle skills and microskills identified in this research that are required to enact both literacy and social inclusion. Many of these are resistant to quantitative measurements, but nevertheless can be captured discursively.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> In reference to *Capabilities*, Martha Nussbaum notes on p 62: "Some capabilities, I suggest, need to be measured in this way and not on a quantitative scale at all. If we thought that a numerical scale would have been helpful in cases involving the freedom of speech, or the freedom of religion, we would probably have used one. Instead, the discursive form of analysis that has evolved seems appropriate for at least some questions involving a threshold level of a fundamental entitlement." Nussbaum, M. (2011). *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Theme	Description of measurable characteristic	Outcome factors
Motivation	To achieve social inclusion goals the person must identify their reasons for doing so, and feel committed enough to overcome barriers to learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Person develops, with support, strategies to develop their motivation</li> <li>• Person attends learning sessions regularly</li> </ul>
The ability to express one's needs, have them heard and respected	This does not entail only literacy skills, but it does include the person understanding how to make themselves heard, respected and understood (personal literacies)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The person being able to say if she/he is happy or not with what is happening and what service they are receiving</li> <li>• The person identifying how they like to communicate and a reciprocal process set up with others if this mode is unusual</li> <li>• The person becoming able to set goals that they and others recognise</li> </ul>
To gain control over aspects of one's life	Many of the measures described below under social inclusion are also indicators of the more personally experienced sense of regaining control, or of gaining control for the first time of aspects of one's life	<p>Measurement of success in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Healthcare</li> <li>• Finances</li> <li>• Housing</li> <li>• Meaningful use and experience of time</li> </ul>
Meaningful use and experience of time	Time, as the most important resource of a person can be wasted (see Social Role Valorisation theory) or used in a way that creates meaning and enjoyment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not all appointments are medical or with service providers</li> <li>• Some appointments are with new friends</li> <li>• Person has a clear idea about what they want to do, and are able to do that</li> </ul>
Affiliation (drawing on Nussbaum's Ten Central Capabilities) is a central "architectonic" capability	Being able to live with and toward others, to recognise and show concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of social interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Person expresses that they have freely-given relationships in their life</li> <li>• Person identifies obstacles to freely-given relationships (e.g. all relationships are with care providers)</li> <li>• Resources are identified to assist person to make friendships and connections in the community</li> </ul>
Practical reason	A second architectonic capability that enables others: Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life (Nussbaum 2011, p34)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The person has a plan that makes sense to them and that reflects their goals</li> <li>• The plan is recorded in a way that they can understand</li> </ul>
Senses, imagination and thought	Being able to use the senses, to imagine, think, and reason – and to do these things in a "truly human" way, a way informed and cultivated by an adequate education, including, but by no means limited to, literacy..." (Nussbaum 2011, p33)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Modes of literacy that are used by the person have been identified</li> <li>• Creative needs are identified where applicable</li> <li>• The person has told or begun to tell their story and is recording it in a medium of their choice</li> </ul>



For indicators of social inclusion we drew on a variety of sources including the capabilities framework of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum and a recognised form of measurement, the social exclusion table of the Brotherhood of St Laurence (BOSL) (2013).

Social inclusion/exclusion indicators as used by the BOSL are high-end indicators that show social trends, to support their social advocacy work. Nevertheless most of those indicators can be adapted for individuals. Martha Nussbaum's Ten Core Capabilities are a rich field of potential indicators, however, they have major relevance to a high level systemic and policy driven approach to international welfare. They have been adapted here where it has been felt that the agency can have some impact. No attempt has been made to include them all.

Outcome measurements in this field will usually be subjective and qualitative but need to have some quantitative relevance to speak the languages of research and governance. Where possible we have combined both approaches in the following table:

Theme	Description of measurable characteristics	Outcome factors
Income and consumption meets minimum socially acceptable conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Income is at or above the poverty line (50% of median income or currently \$358pw)(Australian Council of Social Services 2010)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Agency has enabled person to increase their income by measurable factor (percentage or decimal fraction)</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Able to afford all meals, shelter and other basic costs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Person does not go without meals</li> <li>Person has a safe and sheltered place to live</li> </ul>
Employment and training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Person gets regular and stable employment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Agency supports person to find a decently paid job or refers to an agency that successfully does the same</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Person is enabled to attend mainstream education or employment training</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Person graduates from community literacy to TAFE or other mainstream skills provider</li> </ul>
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Person supported to recover from mental health problems (see Recovery above). This is measured through the person expressing that they are satisfied with their capabilities to change and develop their life circumstances and their own mental health<sup>5</sup></li> </ul>	3 – Has a meaningful life in their own terms and a positive sense of identity. 2 – Has some improvement but a way to go 1 – A long way to go
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has accessed appropriate health providers with support</li> </ul>	3 – Has control over their own mental health recovery process 2 – Has some improvement but a way to go 1 – Has a long way to go
Bodily integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Person is safe and secure (ontological security)</li> <li>Being able to move freely from place to place; to be secure against violent assault</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Person has safe and secure housing (as below)</li> <li>Risk assessment carried out and prevention, mitigation and improvement strategies implemented</li> <li>No incidents occur, or if incidents occur remedial action is swift and effective</li> </ul>

<sup>5</sup> draws on Literature Review on Recovery. NSW Consumer Advisory Group \_ Mental Health Inc NSW Consumer Advisory Group - Mental Health Inc. (NSW CAG) (2009). Literature Review on Recovery.

Housing	To have shelter which is secure, affordable, accessible and appropriate	Shelter to be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• safe</li> <li>• secure</li> <li>• affordable</li> <li>• appropriate</li> <li>• reflecting a valued social status if possible ( e.g. not congregated accommodation for people with disabilities)</li> </ul>
Financial security	Beyond the basic needs described above to address the resources required to fulfill a person's capabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Income meets the expressed needs of the person for a fully satisfying life</li> </ul>
Acquisition of valued social roles	Person acquires and recognises positive roles she/he plays in community such as mother, friend, carer, employee, volunteer, customer This derives from a socially functional perspective and therefore depends on the perception of the community as much as the person themselves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observers can see and recognise that the person has a number of socially valued roles</li> <li>• Person has volunteer roles.</li> <li>• Person has caring role</li> <li>• Person has creative, artistic or expressive role</li> </ul>
Connections with other people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Including the development of a circle of support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Measured by the frequency of meaningful contacts with others in the community of choice</li> </ul>

## APPENDIX 4 Interview questions

### Semi-structured interview guide (comments/feedback welcome)

#### Questions for present participants

1. How long have you been in the Reading and Writing Group?
2. How did you find about it?
3. What is your understanding of what the Reading and Writing Group is trying to do?
4. What do you want to get from being a member of the Reading and Writing Group?
5. Do you enjoy learning with other members of the group?
6. Tell me about the last lesson which you had? What did you learn?
7. What do you like about Reading and Writing Classes?
8. What don't you like about Reading and Writing classes?
9. Is it meeting your goals?
10. Are there any ways in which you think the Reading and Writing group could be improved?

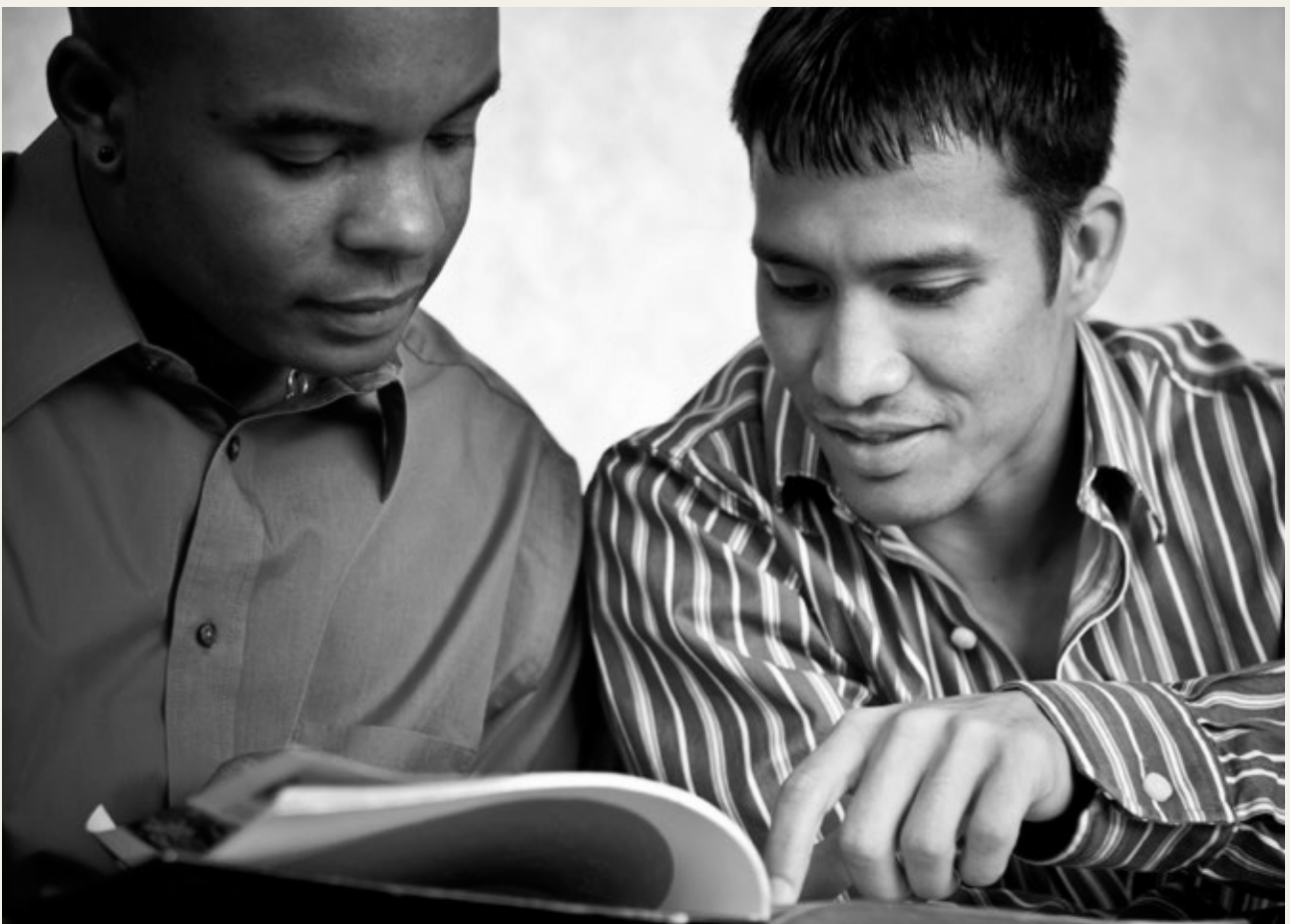
#### Questions for past participants of the Reading and Writing Group

1. When did you take part in the Reading and Writing Group?
2. How did you find out about it?
3. How long were you in the Reading and Writing Group?
4. Are you still in contact with other members of the group?
5. Have you made any friends from the group?
6. Why is reading and writing important to you?

7. What did you want to get from the Reading and Writing Group? What were your goals?
8. Did you achieve all your goals? If so, what helped? If not, what prevented you achieving some of your goals?
9. What did you like the most about the Reading and Writing classes?
10. Was there anything you didn't like about the Reading and Writing classes?
11. Do you have any other thoughts about Reading and Writing classes? Any suggestions for improvements?
12. How have your new skills in reading and writing impacted on your quality of life? How has it made a difference?
13. What else have you learned?
14. Have you participated in any other classes like this one since completing the course?
15. Do you have any advice for anyone who is thinking about joining a group like this?

### **Semi structured interview guide – tutors**

1. What is your philosophy in regard to the importance of literacy and numeracy?
2. What connection do you see between literacy and being included in the community?
3. What do you see as the main benefits for the students participating in the classes?
4. What are the most rewarding aspects of being a tutor? (examples)
5. What are the most challenging aspects of being a tutor? (examples)
6. What are your thoughts on how the classes are structured?
7. What knowledge/skills do you think make you well equipped to be an effective tutor?
8. What modes of instruction do you work with or find comfortable with?
9. Are there any aspects of the class that you think might be organised differently?





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