

SUBMISSION TO THE PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO ADULT LITERACY

We are writing on behalf of the Albany Read Write Now service, a voluntary service assisting adults improve their literacy skills in Albany, Western Australia. Albany is a regional city on the south coast of Western Australia, four hours south of Perth. Read Write Now has been operating in Albany for over 40 years and received the Albany City 2021 Community Citizen of the Year Award. There are currently approximately twenty tutors, and a similar number of students receiving help in Albany at the moment.

Read Write Now provides free one-to-one tutoring for students who have difficulties reading and writing. The student decides what they wish to focus on, such as filling out forms, or reading aloud to their children. We provide a lot of support for students to equip them to complete Centrelink forms and navigate the My Gov website, which are very challenging for anyone with literacy issues.

Albany's population is multicultural with many diverse backgrounds, including a large Indigenous community, newly arrived refugees and many people with English as a second language. We have observed that people learning English as a second language are more likely to seek assistance to improve their literacy than Australians born in this country. Getting students to come to Read Write Now, especially the Australian born, can be challenging due to the stigma around illiteracy. Most of our students come through the Read Write Now 1800 018 802 number. We also have strong links with Albany TAFE, Albany Migrant Centre and the Albany Regional Volunteer Service, but we feel we are missing people who could benefit from our service.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Making use of Aboriginal Services to provide a “wrap around service” linking literacy with parenting, job seeking and life satisfaction.
- Job training programs to offer literacy improvement services.
- Centrelink's requirements should recognise the hours spent in literacy improvement.
- Up to date data is needed to identify gaps in our coverage of the community. We need information on the requirements of people with literacy challenges, which need to include input from a wide range of people who have experienced literacy challenges, not just our students. We could use this data to identify gaps in our coverage and tailor our tutoring. We only obtain information from students on a one-to-one basis, and our data is limited to those who have come forward for assistance.
- Lack of consistent service coverage in Western Australia. We only operate in Albany. Read Write Now has five small regional hubs, which means that many regional areas have no equivalent services. Many of our clients, especially people from Indigenous backgrounds, live a transient lifestyle. We find that often when they move there is no literacy program to link them into at their new location, so they fall out of the system.
- We are a completely volunteer run service. Obtaining volunteer tutors is challenging. Many volunteers are getting older, people are working longer and in Albany there is competition for volunteers.

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Coordinators Albany Read Write Now