



Voices

FIRST-HAND EXPERIENCES OF ADULT
LITERACY LEARNING AND EMPLOYMENT
IN WANGANUI

Elspeth Tilley • Frank Sligo • Fiona
Shearer • Margie Comrie • Niki Murray
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Massey University

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Dedication



This report is dedicated to the memory of the late Dr Su Olsson (1942–2005), respected friend, colleague, and objective leader in the Literacy and Employment Programme.

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Introduction

The very best research, no less than the worst, does and should 'speak' from particular, historically specific, social locations (Harding, 2004, p. 4).

Our most important task at the start of this report is to thank the adult learners of Wanganui who so generously gave their stories to this research. We are privileged to have received such honest and rich insights into adult literacy learning and adult learners' lives. We are grateful that we have learned from those who know this issue best; those who live it every day.

The voices in this report are powerful, poignant, and crucial to understanding the connections and disconnections between literacy and employment. These stories made us weep, smile, or cheer out loud. Some stories made us share the teller's sense of anger or frustration. Some made us reassess what we thought we knew about literacy and learning.

We were inspired by the courage, perseverance, wisdom, and sense of humour of Wanganui's adult literacy learners. We hope that this report does justice to the trust that has been placed in us and that others, too, may be inspired to action by reading these stories and learning where change is needed to our society if there are to be more stories that make us cheer and fewer that make us weep.

These voices are taonga. Respect them, protect them from harm, and use them for the purpose for which they were intended.

These voices come from three sets of interviews: first, with almost ninety adult learners in 2005; second, with many of the same people a year later; and third, with a new group of adult literacy learners in 2006. In all, almost 200 interviews took place with people in adult literacy training. The interviews ranged in length from 20 minutes to more than an hour.

The shape of this report, reflecting the areas of importance put forward during the interviews, is guided by what people told us was most important to them. All interviewees were first asked about barriers to learning and employment, and about what they saw as their most important needs in those areas. However, without prompting, people also told us during interviews not just about what had hampered them or what they needed, but also about positive things or people that had helped them, and about benefits received from training.

Part One of this report is about barriers (obstacles to learning and employment in people's lives); Part Two is about pathways (factors that helped people to achieve learning or employment) and benefits (things that people gained from training); and Part Three is about needs (things people were seeking to enhance their learning or gain future employment).

The first two parts are each subdivided into sections on learning and employment, so that we overview in turn barriers to learning, barriers to employment, then pathways to and benefits of learning, and pathways to employment.

The last part of the report, on needs, is not subdivided into separate sections on literacy needs and employment needs, because in talking with us, people did not clearly distinguish between needing something for learning, or needing something for employment. This last section simply lists what people say they need overall in the general context of talking about learning and employment. In daily life people's learning needs often overlap or are indistinguishable from their employment needs. This last section pictures what adult learners themselves know as the most urgent priorities for government or policy involvement in their lives and communities.

Each section lists typical comments, grouped together into illustrative categories. Each category has a name that reflects the strongest emphasis that these particular comments shared (this is called 'coding' the comments). Our coding of interview transcripts was 'emergent'; that is, it has at all times been led by what the voices were saying. We first looked for any repeated patterns or themes in the voices, then later gave names to those patterns. We simply developed the filing system, as it were, within which to sort the wealth of interviewees' insights.

The voices themselves also guided the order of categories in this report. Within each section, the first category is the one mentioned in the greatest number of interviews, followed by the next most frequently mentioned, down to the least. We have not given precise numerical proportions to show the relative strength of concern, except some very general indicators such as 'around half', 'most', 'many' or 'few'. This is because in this kind of research exact numbers cannot be relied upon. However, we assume that being mentioned in more interviews indicates that an experience is important or relevant to more people. Thus we hope to give you a sense as you move through each section of first encountering the themes that had most widespread or repeated impact in people's lives. Then in turn are the themes which, although still important enough to raise, were less common.

Each category has an accompanying graphic, which is intended to bring alive the sense of these voices as coming from, and still connected with, speaking people. Each graphic uses one or more quotations, however it is important to remember that

there is no one single comment that can stand alone for each category. Therefore the selected quotations in these illustrations should be taken in the context of all the quotations on a particular theme rather than seen as representative of the category.

The photographic backgrounds of Wanganui in these illustrations represent actual places. The visuals of people speaking are Kerry Ann Lee's original creative artwork, and do not relate to any particular individuals. Matching of faces with backgrounds and words was largely random, or followed artistic imperatives.

One final way in which the voices themselves guided this report is in our use or our avoidance of the word 'literacy'. As this report documents, people told us that the word 'literacy' lacked meaning or was derogatory. No interviewees had a goal to be 'literate', nor was 'foundation skills' any more meaningful. All interviewees, however, wanted to learn. Therefore we follow the lead set by the voices, and talk, where possible, about learning, in preference or addition to 'literacy'.

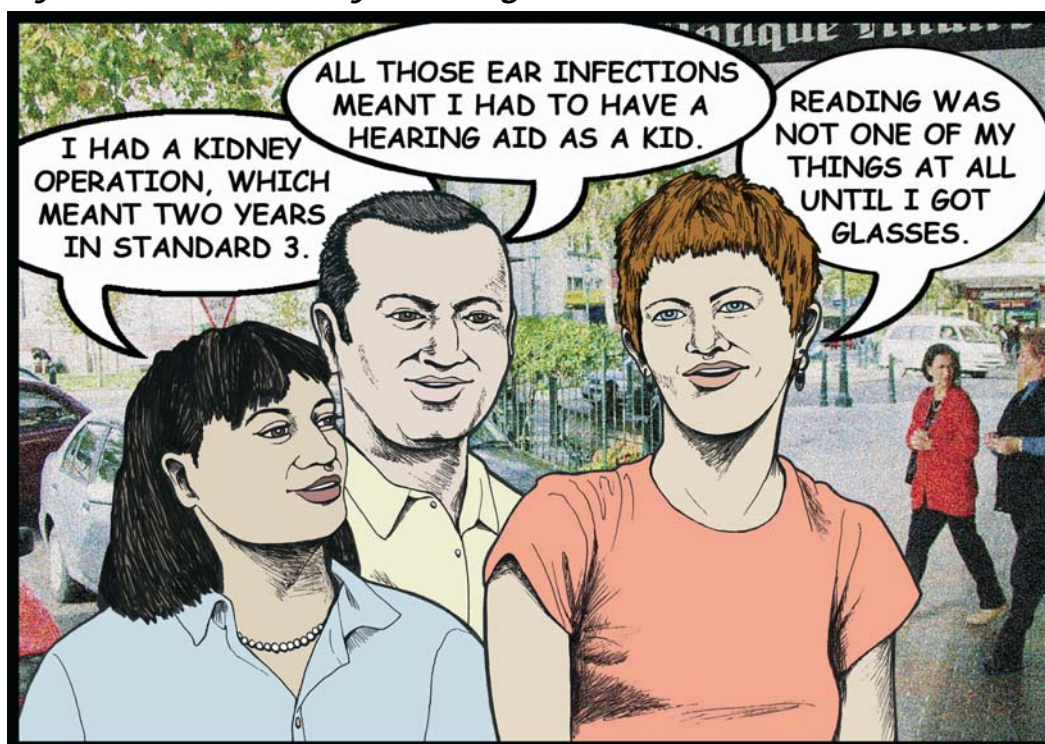
Although we as report facilitators have shaped how the comments are arranged, labelled, and presented, the bulk of this report is what might be called witness testimony. Aside from this introduction, a short summary paragraph at the end of each category, and a concluding summary that brings together the voices' messages, these pages offer Wanganui adult learners' own words, experiences, knowledge, interpretations, priorities, and concerns. Frequently, these pages also offer Wanganui people's own solutions. Communication standpoint theory (e.g. Harding, 2004; Harding & Hintikka, 2003; Smith, 1998) suggests that those who live in a situation can describe it with more objectivity and precision than external observers. Also the 'truest', most productive, and most socially just solutions come from that first-hand standpoint. We have embraced these solutions and incorporated them into our other reports to policy makers and opinion leaders. Here we set out and pay tribute to these insights in their powerful original form: people's own words.

These words express vitality, diversity, intelligence, skill, insight, struggle, survival, patience, futility, anger, empowerment, disempowerment, strength, capability, ingenuity, resourcefulness, adversity, injustice, disadvantage, pain, suffering, hardship, endurance, pride, joy, dexterity, strategy, resistance, and hope. The last word in this introduction we give to Marx and Engels, who said: "As individuals express their life, so they are" (1977, p. 42).

Part One: Barriers

Barriers to Learning

My Health Affected My Learning



I was off school for about six months and I was in plaster. That was a huge gap and I felt that with that gap, and even my parents said, that's where they feel I might have gone wrong somewhere. I still had the work, but it just wasn't sufficient. I needed more, and because of that space and that time ...

It made me feel really stink at school because I always had to sit at the front or ask somebody else or ask the teacher "what is that?" 'cause I can't see.

My attendance is very poor at the moment because of my mental illness. I find it hard to get to course and because I'm always prone to being sick because of my chest infections and bronchitis, etc., I find it very hard just to get to course and literally stay alive. It's been very, very difficult.

'Cause there was my epilepsy, I couldn't retain the information. So that is part of the reason why I left half way through the year in the 5th form. Because I had studied for hours and hours and hours, all this information, but when it came to the exam ...

If I got sick I wouldn't go to school. I would have problems with feeling tired so I'd have days off or not be so bright when I went into class. That's still affecting me now.

My downfall was that I had an accident, got hit by a car when I was a kid.

If I have a bad day with my illness, I just want to sit down and cry, so I stay at home and stay in bed. Because coming in when I'm crook, by coming in here, I'm not going to be able to concentrate, I am not going to be able to achieve anything, and I'll probably end up upsetting most of the classroom, and that's the last thing I want to do.

When I started secondary school I got glandular fever, and so I was off school for six weeks, and I just, I couldn't keep up with high school.

I had a lazy eye. I've still got a lazy eye. It used to get in the way all the time.

I got headaches all the time and I felt sick and I wouldn't go to school because I just felt so sick.

I suffer mental illness and it was misdiagnosed, it was undiagnosed for all of my childhood, and it's not until I'm an adult that I've understood it and come to terms with myself and, yeah, it got in the way of my learning altogether.

My health has affected my attendance and even being here sometimes.

The words would jump around on the page. But you don't come into the awareness of that until later. But it's probably why I didn't read very much. And when I got my glasses it was, 'Oh, the words don't move'.

I've suffered from depression and other problems. It was really hard 'cause I was sort of slow, slow at learning to read, I had difficulty reading, mathematics and all that and because of it I grew to hate the school system.

Health or physical issues were by far the most commonly discussed barrier to learning, whether at school or now in adult training. People were very philosophical about health barriers—but with more than half the people interviewed raising health issues, we recommend that, once a child or adult becomes ill or injured, much better detection, support, and learning maintenance systems are needed to ensure that that illness does not interrupt their current and ongoing learning. Health care systems and providers may need to explore ways to become more consistent referral points for educational support for long-term or repeat patients. The comments told us that we need to see all healthcare users as whole people with a spectrum of needs, not just medical needs.

My Family Environment Affected My Learning



When we were young, we used to get, I wouldn't say hidings, I would say thrashings, and um, most of the time we didn't really didn't go to school, because of those.

My father pulled me out of school when I was in the Third Form and sent me out to work 'cause he said "No point you going to school 'cause you're thick and stupid".

My parents weren't educated. They didn't get a chance to go to school so couldn't teach us the preparation. My father, he never knew how to read and write right up 'til he died.

I think that the main impact on me, learning-wise, was when my mum and dad got divorced. I was 11 years old. I was getting to that difficult age and, yeah ... Like, why bother, sort of thing.

On my 11th birthday, Dad started feeling really sick. And then about 18 months later, he was diagnosed with cancer ... I sat there for three months watching him die. No school, I didn't go to school. Just sat there drinking and getting stoned so I could handle it.

Mum died and Dad went and got married and sold our house and so the whole thing crumbled on my life, and I put it all behind. I dropped education. I just dropped learning anything.

I think it was because of home as well. I couldn't cope anywhere really. I just used to stay with my mates.

Mum didn't really care. She didn't really notice, even. She was a heavy, heavy drinker, so she was drinking every day and she didn't really notice. I never did homework. Because Mum was always arguing with Dad and Dad was always drinking and Mum was always in a tantrum.

May not have had the best life. I didn't have much school, you know. Always going with my parents to things, and hardly at school. Parent interviews would come, my parents wouldn't go, and that was really disappointing.

I got thrown in to working so early. We had a shop ... so I got thrown in to doing that and there was no encouragement to be yourself or to be what you want to be, future-wise.

My father, he was really strict and we never sort of really, I could never really talk to him about what was going on. That was tough. By the end of high school, that was it, I just couldn't take it and I left early, which I regret now 'cause I felt I left school without any education and actually I left school feeling I was worthless and stupid.

I think Mum probably just wanted me to go to work. She never had an education either, my mum, and I think she just couldn't wait for me to finish school.

I had no mother. She was there, but education was just zero to her. My dad? His way of teaching was "You don't know what that word is?" – punch.

In around half of the interviews, people described something from their family background as slowing or interrupting their learning, for example lack of support for learning in the home, family violence, a parent dying, divorce, or being removed from school by a parent. The people making these comments described their family as the source of such barriers, so we have followed their lead and coded it that way even though—as the speakers also frequently pointed out—family issues inevitably have wider social connections and origins. Poverty or economic deprivation was so frequently mentioned in connection with 'family' barriers, that we created a separate, specific code for economic barriers to learning.

These comments about family led us to recommend, in policy reports, that literacy learning cannot be 'treated' in isolation, but that learning barriers must be seen in the context of the whole person within their social situation. Tackling literacy issues also means addressing issues such as family violence and substance abuse. More research may be needed in areas such as whether better support systems can be provided for children whose family circumstances are changing, such as through parents separating, in order to ensure changes in family circumstances don't excessively disrupt learning.

My Goal Orientation Was A Barrier To My Learning



Actually, I never really thought about growing up. I used to actually wonder whether I would still be alive when I hit 21.

I just never did anything before. I just didn't do anything about it. Before I found this place I just actually thought "Well, I can't read and write, and that's going to be my problem for the rest of my life".

Having no encouragement and no goals ... you know. It can be a scary thing.

What was holding me back from getting School Certificate was not knowing what I wanted to do, really, where I wanted to go in life.

When I was a kid first it was a policeman. Then I found out that that's too hard.

I wanted to be a policewoman. Not any more, 'cause I won't pass. I smoke, so I won't pass the fitness.

I didn't want to be anything, just be a kid.

When I was in school I never really had enough driving force to think about what I wanted to do when I was older. I felt that I had a lot more time.

I wanted to be a lawyer or an accountant, and I was training up to be one at school from the third form to the fifth form but just decided to drop out and try something else.

I wanted to become a doctor or a pharmacist but that didn't happen because I realised that I had to know too much.

I actually wanted to be a hairdresser. When I got to high school and my mum met a lady who owned her own hair salon and she told me that it was really hard, it was awful, during the apprenticeship. She said her career didn't really start until she owned her own business and it cost her a lot of money, big loans, and she said it wasn't worth it in the end.

I wasn't really interested in a career. If one came along, well fine, but it wasn't something that I headed out for. When you think about like all those big things like lawyers and getting into politics and stuff, you think it's really hard.

I don't remember ever wanting to be anything really. I'm still trying to figure out what I really want to do now. I was probably my own ... I never showed any great ambition to do anything, so ...

I always wanted to be a policeman, but because I had got a record, a minor record on minor burglary charges and stuff like that, and shoplifting charges, all the stories that I was hearing were that I'd just blown it for the rest of my life. Not even a 'Oh, maybe if I stayed clean for 20 years I might be able to ...'. People were just saying, 'No, that's it man. Once you break the law, that's it. You'll never be a policeman'.

More than a third of people talked about goals in some way when talking about what they felt had prevented them learning to their full capacity. Many talked about not having any goals when younger, and later regretting not having set a clearer life direction earlier. Many wished they had had a better understanding, while at school, of how school learning linked to other goals. Others talked about having goals, but feeling unable to reach them or not knowing how to reach them, and needing information, encouragement, or other help to plan and take the steps towards reaching the goal. These comments led us to recommend, in policy reports, that well-supported personal action plan training be provided in schools and elsewhere, so that more people are supported to set their own goals and feel confident that they know how to work towards them and can make progress, step by step.

Teachers At School Affected My Learning



She said, "You can sit here and do it, but you're not going to pass". And she drummed that into me. So in her every class I took, I didn't pass.

One thing I would hate was when I got a bad mark on my English test, and the tutor really rubbed it in my face. Why should I try, you know, if he's going to do that? So a whole year, my School C year, I decided, nah, I'm not even going to try. I'm not even going to study.

The teachers assumed I would be the same as my brothers, and that meant I was singled out, quite markedly. Although metal work was a class that I really wanted to do quite a lot of work in, I was put at the back of the class and made to copy out stuff from a book instead of doing the metalwork which I really wanted to do.

School was really complicated. There were teachers there that either didn't have the patience, or "We'll sit this student at the back of the class". Then they fall through the system.

I think the things that really turned me off at school were teachers, their attitudes and racism. I had a huge problem with racism when I was at school. You knew it, but the teachers just wouldn't admit it. I'm thinking, "Why are you continuously picking on me? What have I done wrong to you?" And all my other mates, they knew it. There were four of us in the class and they got as much of a hard time as I did.

The teachers just always seemed to belittle me, especially in front of the class. One teacher said to me, in 3rd Form, that I couldn't even spell C-A-T. That will always stick in my head. It really starts affecting your manner because you know that that teacher is going to be there and he's going to give you the same problems, he's going to give you the same hard time.

Another brother of mine, about a year older than me, excelled at school and I was getting, "Well, why don't you apply yourself and be more like him? You know you can do it". And I just copped an attitude and decided, "Stuff you all".

I can't do mathematics at all, to be quite truthful. I don't even know my times tables, 'cause that's the way the school was. No one showed me, or took time to show me this is what you need to know. It just wasn't done. I think there's no compassion.

I just didn't like the teachers, some of them were real eggs. You try and ask them something and they look at you like you should know the answer, but you don't. I used to always ask questions. I think it was just annoying for them 'cause I always asked them.

They had that downtrodden teaching. I call it downtrodden because that's how we became. 'You can't do this. Look, you can't even spell.' She did it to Māori children. Not so much English children, but to the Māori. And it was, 'Oh, well. This is how they think of us. Oh, well. Let them think it like that. That's how I'll be'.

She just kept saying, 'You don't want to learn.' And I'm going, 'Yes, I do. Yes, I do. I just need some help'. And she'd just go off to somebody else who could do it, which obviously makes her feel better, but definitely didn't make me feel better.

More than a third of people specifically talked about poor teaching or negative teaching during school years as a barrier to their learning. Some had experienced racism by teachers, teachers refusing to answer their questions, putting them down, or using physical punishment. A consistent theme was that teachers doubting or pre-judging their ability (because of family associations or cultural identity, because of learning style, or for no apparent reason at all) had had a lasting impact on their life. Many people were still living with feelings of anger or low self-esteem as a result of victimisation or pigeonholing by a particular teacher or teachers.

These comments led us to recommend that first-hand testimony such as this be developed into a resource specifically for use during teacher training. We also suggest these comments indicate that teachers themselves need greater support within the classroom and the school environment in general, so that they can offer more one-to-one help when it is asked for and avoid sitting learners with varying needs at the back of the class where they are out of sight and out of mind. Class size is also clearly part of the complex matrix leading to students' experiences of inadequate teaching.

School Just Generally Did Not Meet My Needs



School was the most boring time of my life. I didn't like being inside and I didn't like putting pen to paper. I didn't like any of my school days. They rung my mum and told her all they were doing was babysitting me and that Mum needs to take me out of school ...

I'd done all my work, it's just that I'd done it too fast and then I mucked around and got in trouble for the rest of the period.

I've never been a school person. I tried. But primary school, I couldn't do anything. I couldn't read or ... I could read, but it just went in one ear and out the other.

They told me at a very young age I was quite bright, but I felt, from things at school, that I wasn't.

I didn't like school. I'd always run off and do my own thing. I'd be too far ahead of the class and it wasn't funny, or I just wouldn't bother because it was just a waste of time.

School was just really like a hassle because I had no friends and I always felt like I was always on my own. I was always constantly doing stuff by myself. Always get out there with a net-ball and shooting hoops by myself.

School sucked. I'd ask for the help. I'd get a bit of help but ... I was at school, I'd be in class and everyone would be over here and I'd be the odd one on the side.

I guess I learn better outside the school boundaries than I did in because outside the school boundaries I got more help. I got time taken to help me to understand what we were doing. At school they don't concentrate on the slow people; they concentrate on the brainy people, so I only stayed at school until I was fifteen.

I used to get Ds and Fs at college and then when I went on correspondence, about four months after that, I was getting A+s, so I learnt more on correspondence than I did at school.

I didn't like it, I hated school. Right from the start. I used to make excuses that I was sick so I wouldn't have to go. I don't know; it was just I don't work too well in a big group I think.

School should be more about using your imagination, doing something that you're interested in so it actually gets your attention, then you'll be more focused and want to actually do it. I don't think I got that much out of school, 'cause I read all the time at home and I always watched the news as well. I knew a lot about the world already, like history, how to read and write and do maths and stuff. Probably maths is the best thing that I got out of there, but when I left school it was then knowing that I should have done better at school.

My schooling life, I wish it had been a lot more understanding back then. I had the ability, but no one was really willing to take the time to sit down and be patient and to listen to me emotionally as to what was really going on. I felt isolated, I fell into a lot of depression and isolation and I just started withdrawing from people and became very, very much a loner.

About one third of people described school as not meeting their needs in some way. This was separate from mentions about teaching or teachers specifically, and also separate from other specific criticisms of schooling such as the curriculum being out of date. Sometimes this general sense of not achieving at school was probably related to an unidentified learning style not being catered for, but other times it was vaguer, just a sense of school in general being 'not for me'. This probably derives from problems in teaching, pastoral care, class size, goal orientation, confidence, and support at home. However we have coded it simply as 'not meeting needs' to reflect people's own sense of uncertainty as to what went wrong for them at school rather than try to force these more general comments into particular categories.

Such comments indicate a need for more systematic ways to identify learners whose needs are not met by traditional school environments. Also implied is the need for a wider range of learning situations and methods, plus a curriculum students see as relevant to their lives. Adult literacy issues are not just about so-called 'slow' learners' needs not being met at school. They also include 'fast' learners' needs not being addressed at school, given the number of interviewees who found school tasks too easy and the curriculum uninteresting.

Peers At School Were A Barrier To My Learning



Kids today just pick on other kids. I was too worried about the bullies than actually learning, so I suppose in a way my mind drifted. School was not good. Primary school I got belted around. I'd get donked at home and I'd go to school and get donked at school.

I got called up in front of assembly, to receive a Principal's Award, and that was the end of my learning. I got bullied big time after that 'cause I got called up in front of all the school and, yeah, got beat up and, "You bloody nerd". It wasn't much fun. So that was sort of the end of ... 'cause I was trying to play myself off as dumb. "No, I'm not a nerd", you know, to fit in with everyone.

I just, I could've done it. I knew I could have done it, but the whole... I didn't want the same to happen at my new school as what happened at my old school, like everyone thought I was all geeky and I was brainy and shit. So I just like started going out partying. Got pissed the night before the exams, and turned up with hangovers.

I got in with a bad crowd by that stage, like 'cause I was a nerd so I had to hang with the cool critters to redeem myself I suppose. I never actually like got into drugs, 'cause I didn't agree with them, but I suppose the school had written me off by then. It's like "one of them".

I wasn't enjoying my classes as much because of the people that I had in my classes. They were just hard to work with and they were quite violent and because of everyone else in the class, the teachers stopped teaching and stopped in the middle of something to yell at everyone else. And I found it hard to keep up with my work.

Bullying when I was at primary school ... which happened to make me switch schools and then it happened all again, at this new school. Told the teachers and they were just useless. It made me just think, "Well, fuck. I don't want to be at school". So I was packing these sickies. And that's how I started smoking because, you know, I had too much time on my hands now, packing too many sickies.

Bullying is a big thing in schools, not so much primary schools, but the high schools. There sort of seems to be quite a lot of peer pressure and yeah, so that's sort of a big issue, I think. And that can knock somebody off course.

School was a hassle. But now that I'm older and left school I wish I did more with my time when I was at school, but when you're young you've got like all your peers and that, they were doing their thing. You wanna be like that, so you do it as well.

In the 5th Form I just started hanging out with mates who liked to smoke weed. I didn't do that in the 3rd and 4th Form. I was a straight A student in the 3rd Form.

It was kind of hard during primary school because people used to pick on you. You're just little kids and then you'd start hanging out with the hard group and all that.

Just going through a big teenage thing, you know? I was trying to be like everybody else, and I was just going out and wagging school all the time and getting on the piss.

You know, you have a lot of people around you at that college who are just useless, honestly. All they talk about all day is doing drugs or drinking and smoking cigarettes, oh sex as well.

Form 1 and 2, I had a lot of problems with teasing. That's the age where children notice each other and they're quite judgey at that age. Yeah, I used to get quite a bit of teasing. I used to get picked on 'cause I was quite big.

I used to hang around with the wrong crowd, wag school and all that, when I was at school. Being a college in the middle of town, that doesn't mean going to town instead of school but, at that age, that's what it exactly meant.

Around a third of people talked about really wanting to learn at school but experiencing their school peers as disruptive to their learning. Sometimes this was through peer pressure not to seem too studious; other times it was because the entire class's learning was disrupted by a particular student or group of students. Many people reported bullying, and identified this as a direct barrier to their learning at school. Again, we could only conclude from the prevalence of these comments that more rigorous systems are needed in schools (in class and outside of class) to produce a learning environment in which every child feels safe, and in which every child is enabled to participate in ways that engage them.

My Employment Commitments Have Interrupted My Learning



No time on my hands working seven days virtually, so yeah, pretty hard.

I would love to have a trade behind me, which I would like to do so I could work out which one I want to do, and do it in my spare time, so I can enrol and do it at night, when I can. But at the moment, this job is taking up a lot of my time. But if I get a couple of hours a week that I can spare, I would like to have a trade.

It's getting the time to do it. Because security work, we've just had an emergency and they needed all guards on hand and you're there sometimes day and night. We don't get a break so, as time for learning, we just need one day a week or something to get stuck into some serious learning. If I don't have that learning, well, I can't go, I don't think I can go ahead.

I had a full-time job at the time and that stopped me from coming to the course.

I missed class when I got called back at work. I needed the job.

I got a job and I worked there for about a month and a half and then I wasn't going to course, I was just working all day every day.

I found it really difficult to be able to complete the units that I had to complete because they were not always available. My work days didn't always coincide with them. There were two tutors. One would work two days, the other would work three. I always seemed to be working on those days and it made it really hard and, in the end, I just didn't bother.

If I get a job there it will be \$900 per week in the hand tax free, so I wouldn't be continuing with the course.

I only did not quite half a year of Fifth Form ...I wasn't getting good credits. I wasn't really passing anything for NCEA level 1, so I didn't see the point in it. I just thought I may as well go out and get a job. And sure enough, I did.

I don't actually have time for sports or anything, I'm running four jobs.

I'm not going to work full-time, so I'm trying to find jobs that fit in with the course, but maybe if I got a real good offer to go somewhere, or if somebody had a really good job for me, then I would probably go.

A busy day on the farm and the manager asking me to work would stop me attending.

During our busy time if we're flat tack – then I would be reluctant to come to course, 'cause I mean the other senior worker he's on a course as well and that would only leave the boss at work.

At the moment I wanna concentrate on the courses, 'cause I know if I, if I stop doing it and I just go and get some job, I'll probably never do it again...

More than a quarter of respondents mentioned difficulties juggling work and study commitments, or giving up learning in favour of an offer of work. These comments led us to recommend that employers be offered better incentives for creating 'study-friendly' workplaces, both through flexible timetabling and workplace resources such as an area suitable for studying during breaks.

We also suggested that it may be helpful if Work and Income redefined its overall goals to look at ways of developing jobseekers on a whole-person basis, including continuing their learning simultaneously with employment, rather than seeing employment alone as a sufficient outcome. Some people noted that their employers were flexible and did value their learning, but that it was not always easy to have the confidence to ask for time off for study.

School Didn't Cater For My Learning Style



Learning off the blackboard wasn't my cup of tea.

I was a hands-on person, but a lot of work they'd given me was theory, book work. My understanding was not how they understood. If I did it by hands on I could show them, but that's not what they wanted. They wanted me to be what they wanted me to be.

It just wasn't my style of learning, sitting in a class being told what to do. I hate paperwork.

The way that they taught, they didn't care if you couldn't learn that way. When I went to school and read; nothing. What they were trying to teach me meant nothing. Couldn't see it.

I learn by being told how to do it, and being shown how to do it, and then being let loose to do it.

I'm a watcher learner. And the other two boys who did poorly were the same, watching.

If someone gives me a bit of paper with instructions on it, you might as well just say, 'You can't do it'. And I can't. So... and that's just ... I realise that's not a, not a disability, it's just my bringing up. That's how I am.

I kind of hate writing things down but I don't mind typing things on the computer. I learn more when things are in a visual manner.

I'm a think tank person. You put me in a group of people ... I did it last night ...I couldn't help myself when someone mentioned something and I said "Well, such and such", and they hadn't thought of that. I'd drop ideas and say, "Here's something", and they can run with it, that sort of thing. But I didn't have a think tank when I was at school. It wasn't ...in primary school, especially ...to me it was a crushing machine, my academic life in there.

I couldn't understand what was being taught to me so sometimes I'd just switch off, and I'd half pick it up later on. I eventually got around to knowing what they meant, but for me I think actions speak louder than words. Somebody can sit there and talk to you and say, "This is how it is". But, for instance, if someone said, "Oh you know how to dig a hole?" And you do it. That's what I mean by actions speak louder than words. I look at a diagram saying where you've got to put it in, and I lose my way. But if someone will stand there and let me do it, I know. Actions for me are a bit more than diagrams.

When the teachers write things on the blackboard, because I'm not a very fast writer, I could never get the work down in time ...and then I'd be in trouble 'cause I hadn't written all the work down.

I had grasped the concept of reading, of forming words in my mind, but my speech wasn't too hot when I was a kid and I couldn't form the words and it frustrated the heck out of me.

I couldn't handle being in a classroom. It was just too confining for me. I was happier...if we could have taken the classroom outside I would have done heaps better than what I did. Even now I don't like being cooped up inside. I find it too hard to concentrate at times.

Many people who spoke to us were aware of their personal learning style, often through being introduced to concepts of learning style during their adult learning experience. Most who could identify their learning preference indicated that traditional schooling not meeting their particular learning style had been a significant barrier to their learning.

Again, this led us to suggest that better methods are needed at school to identify students whose needs are not met by standardised classroom teaching, and to provide a diversity of teaching styles in ways that support and value, rather than stigmatise, diversity of learning style.

My Own Behaviour At School Affected My Learning



I don't know, I was just destructive in classrooms in those days. Ratbags, you'd call them ...Never really had a chance.

I ended up getting into trouble so I could leave school, 'cause I didn't want to stay there, but now I actually regret it. It wasn't a good thing.

I didn't pass 5th Form. I got kicked out half way through. Aced all of my classes for both years and then in 5th Form I just went off the rails. I never quite jumped back on.

I would just sit there and 'cause honestly I had the biggest attitude in the world back then, that I don't need to listen to anybody, nobody can tell me what to do.

At intermediate school I started to get quite rebellious with bad behaviour and started to smoke. I wasn't treated respectfully and so I guess bad behaviour was a way of getting back.

I left school in the end because I didn't really ...I don't like authority, I'd have to say. Yeah. I just didn't like ...and it was like the teacher did something to the student and it wasn't right and I'd stand up for her and wouldn't take it.

I was expelled that day. I just stood up, as a reaction I just kicked a hole in his desk and walked on out. And that's the end of my education.

I was expelled and they wouldn't let me into any other school. After that, I was just, I just had enough of school. I just gave up on it at the age of 14, going on 15 and then went and played rugby league.

When talking about their schooling years, nearly one-fifth of people described behavioural incidents that interrupted their learning, often resulting in their being suspended, asked to leave or expelled. Even though many of the respondents blamed themselves for their behaviour, others elsewhere attributed their behaviour at school to related barriers such as school not meeting their learning or pastoral care needs, or issues flowing from their home life into their school behaviour. Some indicated that they were reacting to what they felt were unfair or discriminatory teaching practices.

Many of these same students experienced learning success in different kinds of environments such as sport or adult learning environments. Again, these comments led us to suggest that some standard schooling practices (such as expulsion) need to be reassessed in ways that take account of broader factors influencing behaviour at school. Given the correlation between expulsion and subsequent learning needs later in life, it would be productive to look at ways that schools can adapt to students' varying needs, in preference to managing behaviour by removing individuals and branding them as problems.

We believe these comments about behaviour, in the context of people's issues with learning and school generally, indicate that schools are failing to adequately service those students who are expelled, and that other options to exclusion and expulsion need to be explored. Further, efficient follow-up systems need to track students after expulsion and ensure their learning needs are met in other ways.

Motivation Or Relevance Issues Affected My Learning



When they tried to talk about it, I was checking out some girl over there or over here, you know what I mean? But I was still sitting there and making out ...that's what I mean when I say I was a bit slow on things. What I mean ...I had no interest in it.

When I was fourteen or fifteen that was really the key part of my life when I really needed to do really well at school but I thought nothing of it really. That kinda stuffed it up.

Oh people think "oh school's dumber, school's this, school's that" ... but when you get older you actually look back and you're like "oh what'd I do that for?" Shoulda actually gone there and got working.

I don't know what it was but I just didn't want to learn. There were a lot of other distractions, I suppose.

I just didn't see a point in it. You don't really need to write and read for cutting meat.

Computer skills are not really important. Basically what you need is your butchering skills.

Unless they want to do it for a job that they want to do, it's not really worth it. There's no point in teaching it to them - if they're not even going to use it later in life.

Reading and writing and computer skills are not really that important to getting a job. You don't really use that kind of stuff on farms.

Going out and doing the work in the bush and the shearing shed, there's no need there for reading and writing and computers. It's different if you're a contractor.

I learnt that it didn't matter whether you were up here as far as intelligence, or down here because when you left school it depended on who you married as to whether you had a comfortable life or not.

I'm not so sure it is needed in the work force. I mean ... you do need a certain amount; you do need to know how to read a few things and certainly an education, but you don't need a hell of a lot. You can start off working and do a beginners' course sort of thing where you go straight into a job and basically you can learn everything you need to know for that job.

Many people suggested that their own attitude or motivation levels were a barrier to their learning. Some said that they were not motivated to learn because they did not think that literacy learning was necessary to employment or helpful for them in their life in general.

We included here comments about attitudinal barriers but not specific responses relating to goal orientation or lack of confidence, which although related to motivation have been coded separately to provide a breakdown of motivational themes. Note that we are not interpreting the motivation issues that are mentioned as the definitive causes of a learning barrier. They may be symptomatic of another barrier, such as school not meeting needs or a lack of positive reinforcement. The codes reflect what participants talk about rather than confirming causal relationships.

People who have not been exposed to positive experiences that construct learning as a means to an end or a goal in itself may take personal responsibility for their lack of motivation, even though it has wider social causes. As a result some people become stuck in a vicious cycle of guilt, shame, or self-blame. As one person said, "I'm 20 and I still... get stuck in the emotion and the guilt. You get trapped and you can't do anything". These comments led us to recommend better mentoring, goal-setting, and life-planning support for students at school and in communities more broadly. We also felt that the powerful and compelling stories of those who have lived this experience would be a valuable resource for training teachers, careers officers, and mentors within such programmes.

Time Required For Family Or Community Commitments Disrupts My Learning



I've got a son and a partner and she's also doing a course and career as well. And it's trying to find a place for him, a crèche and that, and trying to figure out how we are all going to do things.

It's pretty difficult to get to class when one of my kids is sick.

I wasn't able to concentrate, because we had to help with nine sisters and three brothers - there's fifteen counting Mum and Dad. I didn't do well at school, because I would be up ironing till one or two in the morning.

I had to concentrate more on my little sister, than myself, and her learning, 'cause she got bullied quite a lot at school. So that affected me quite a lot.

I've had to work at the church, 'cause when there's a funeral and they want a cup of tea I have to organise that.

I don't turn up if I'm sick or something happened to the kids. I've missed class if my son is sick.

When I've got my midwife appointments I just get the day off the course.

I've had too many days off, which is not good. I know it's not good. But I can't help it. People die and then I have to go.

I had a couple of stages where my daughter was having problems sleeping and my life was exhausting. I was exhausted and I thought, "I'm not letting myself down, but I just need to recuperate". Because, you know, if you don't get enough sleep your brain...

Dad wanted me to go along with him for a scan so I just took the morning off just to be with him.

When I first started I missed three weeks, but that was due to family...my grandmother was diagnosed with cancer. So I stayed with her and my family for a while.

My partner has got some ongoing stuff in Wellington, so when he has to go, I go with him.

I had to give up my voluntary work to come here to the Teacher Aides programme.

There's two reasons that may stop me is if anything happened to my mother, you know I've got to put her and my parents first, they come first before my studies, if anything happens to my dad like I said he's in his 70s. If he was to have a stroke or a heart attack I've got to look after him first. That's the same as my mum, she's in the last stages of Alzheimer's disease.

Around one-fifth of people mentioned issues to do with balancing family or community responsibilities with study, or discussed giving up or missing study because of family or community commitments. Support for child-care to enable learning was often mentioned, and caring for older relatives also cropped up frequently. These comments led us to recommend, in policy reports, that people's learning be viewed as integrally connected with levels of support in other areas of their lives.

People were positive about their adult training courses' levels of flexibility if they needed to miss occasional classes. This indicated that tutors supported them to catch up on missed work up to a point. Yet in general we felt these comments suggested that more comprehensive levels of community support would enable more people to attend more training more often. A number of elder children reported their learning had suffered because they were called upon to care for younger children. This suggests that better detection and support systems are needed for school students whose home lives are challenging or undergoing change, to ensure that their learning needs are still met.

I've Experienced Economic Barriers To My Learning



The reason why we didn't go to school was, we didn't have lunch or clothes, shoes. You know, just, just things you have to have.

Everything around you makes it difficult as well. Like, you know, money. It sort of decides whether you can do what you want to do.

I wanted to be a mechanic and wanted to get into a mechanics' apprenticeship but I couldn't afford the training. It was all too expensive and I didn't have the money.

'Cause I'm not on a benefit I had to pay for the course and I, it's hard to come up with \$80 ...

I stopped the class because I needed the extra money, at the time.

We haven't got email, can't afford it.

I couldn't afford to pay my School C and all that, and my dad couldn't afford it, and by Sixth Form I was saying, "well I'm not gonna get my Sixth Form Certificate, not paying my school fees", so I left school.

I did want to go to university but I didn't finish my 7th form year so I didn't get bursary and, also, we don't have enough money to pay for all that.

I'd like to get a more advanced certificate if I could afford to, but I don't think I can. I don't want to get a student loan.

Our school didn't have the financial to get a one-on-one teacher to come in the class and help you.

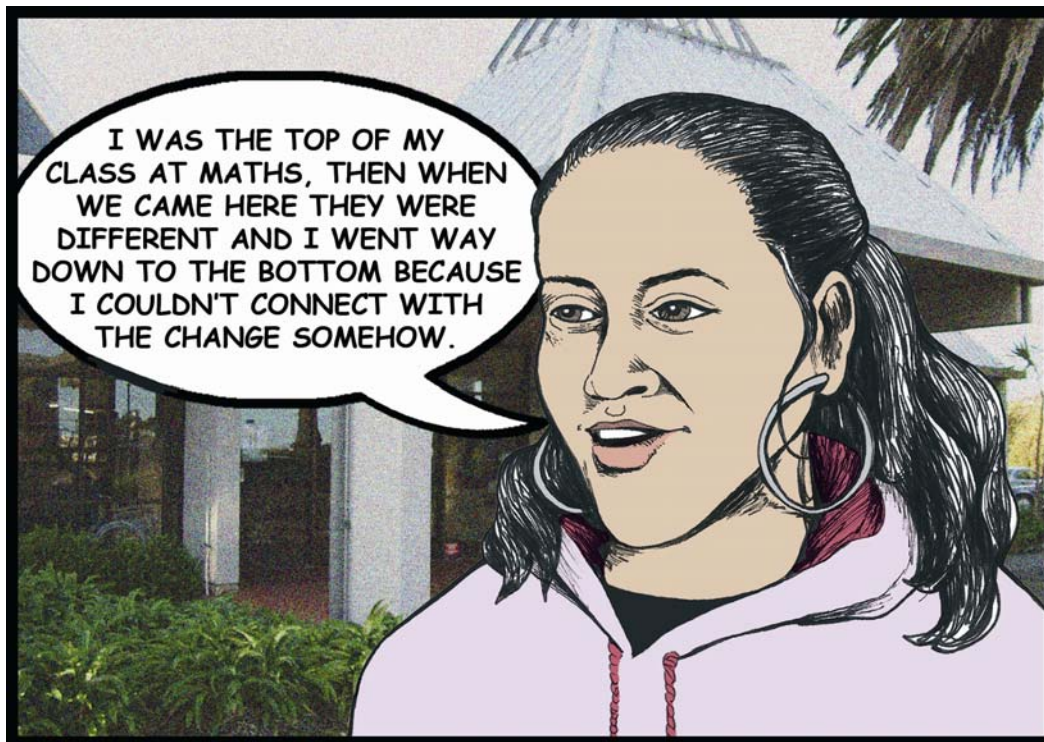
I couldn't get any money at all because Study Link wouldn't give me anything because if you're under 25, even if you're married, you still have to go under your parents, so I had a bit of trouble there.

In the last four months since I've been here, I want to do every course. And they're saying, No, no, because of the fees, and blow the fees, I just want to do courses. But I had to worry about the fees because – big bill – but I'm really enjoying it, the education.

A number of people nominated economic barriers to literacy learning, such as prohibitive cost of courses, need to be at work specifically for financial reasons, or economic factors in their family background that limited their learning opportunities. There was widespread and deeply-felt reluctance to enter into student loans to finance studies.

Given these insights are from people who actually have entered training, it seems likely that economic barriers and resistance to student loans are even greater among those not currently studying. These comments led us to suggest that access to free training be broadened. The perceived cost of education is clearly contributing to widening disparities in society.

Moving Schools Affected My Learning



I used to love school so much I'd come home, I was about maybe about ten or eleven or something I would get home and I would stay up until about 10.30pm doing homework because I loved school so much. And then we moved, and then for some reason I just must have decided that I didn't want to do anything anymore. I suppose it was because I was moving away from my friends and that. And I just thought, no – I don't want to go to school any more. I didn't like to do anything at school, got kicked out of school. I just kept on getting into trouble basically from when I was thirteen to maybe sixteen seventeen.

I don't have School C. Personally, I shouldn't be as intelligent as I am because I've moved around from one school to another until I started Intermediate and then moved on to College. Primary school, I went all over the place, you could say. I went down south and up north.

I went to just about every single primary school in Wanganui. We used to move around a lot. Moving backwards and forwards to my parents and my mum's sister and back to my parents and to my mum's sister.

I was picking up and learning heaps but then when I moved ... I didn't pick up anything for years. Primary school was really difficult so therefore high school was even more difficult – I left when I was fourteen.

I have to cope and adapt. And change, I have to deal with. And I am very insecure and that insecurity is caused by change.

I got moved out of that school because it was a naughty school, or something, and Mum didn't want me there. She moved me to another school and that's where I got all my bad habits from.

Since I was thirteen I haven't lived anywhere for more than a year ... all these different places and kept getting kicked out of schools – and people kept sending me away and stuff and even though I wasn't, you know ...like, I just had a big attitude problem.

I think I lost my connection with my family. It was just me and my mum that moved so it was a big change and I didn't adapt very well and as a result my learning did suffer.

We chopped and changed fairly regularly even with us moving or teachers moving from schools, schools closing.

Basically I just wanted help with my maths work, 'cause moving around as a kid, maths was the one that suffered, um different teachers with different ways.

I couldn't get the stability that I wanted. I was forever going to new schools and not finding the sort of friendships or the people that made me feel comfortable and stable. I was very aware of not fitting in.

Around one-sixth of people we talked to mentioned that moving schools had created learning barriers for them. This was sometimes in connection with attending large numbers of different schools, but was more often in connection with just one school move causing irreparable disruption to learning. These comments led us to recommend that there was an urgent need for greater support for students who move schools, even if only once, both with pre-preparation for the move, and with support after the move.

We recommended better liaison between schools when students transfer, to ensure the transition is as smooth as possible, better pastoral support and mentoring for students in new school environments, and in general just better recognition of the potentially high impact of changing schools on some students' learning processes.

Lack Of Positive Reinforcement Has Affected My Learning



You're called stupid and idiot and dumb and you'll never succeed. I'm quite angry about that. I'll never let anyone speak to a child like that if, if I ever hear them, because I know what it's done to me.

I learnt not to speak up. I learnt to hold my tongue and not to share ideas.

My other friends the same age went on to the next class and they just turned their backs on me and moved away from me. They didn't want to help me because they had already stamped me, "She can't learn this. We're not going to help her. She's a lost cause".

There was something there that affected me from primary school, but I didn't realise until later on in my life, 'til oh, only just a few years ago I think. And I realised what someone spoke over my life. I think it affected me, all my life. And that was being called a dummy, and being slapped across the ears in the 2nd form. I realised that years later. I thought, 'Wow is that why I was...?' Had a lack of confidence, being called a dummy. I sort of snickered at that just then but really, it wasn't funny when you think about it, 'cause I think it affected me, throughout my whole life. Subconsciously, you know. 'Cause I've lacked confidence, I've always had self doubt. And sometimes I withdraw, I withdrew in, in myself. And people thought I was a quiet person and I think that is probably one of the reasons, for that,

you know. It wasn't just once being called a dummy, you know, probably throughout a couple of years; throughout the two years in those classes.

Being called stupid or you're lazy or you're dumb, you're not going to achieve to anything. You know to say that to a young kid, it's devastating.

Many people spoke about the way in which negative comments and put-downs left a lasting impression on them. This issue cropped up specifically in relation to particular teachers (and was put under the 'poor teaching' code where it was attributed to teachers) but sometimes it was from a wider source such as throughout schooling in general or from family, peers, or other people during childhood. A lack of positive reinforcement occurred so frequently that we created this category to indicate its prevalence and show examples of how it shaped people's lives.

These comments led us to recommend, in policy reports, that literacy must be approached in terms of the whole person, not just the teaching of mechanics. People cannot learn if they believe they cannot learn. These comments indicate that programmes in the community offering broad skills in positive reinforcement (e.g., training in positive parenting) will have flow-on benefits for literacy levels.

Parenting courses are sometimes ordered by the Family Court, in which case they may be seen as punitive, and are offered by some community and church groups to people thought to be 'at risk'. Yet if they could be repositioned as a positive, life-enhancing service and made freely available to (indeed, positioned as a normal cultural expectation upon) *all* first-time parents, the long-term social and economic benefits would greatly outweigh the initial delivery costs.

Lack Of Transport And Isolation Have Affected My Learning



'Cause I cannot read, I cannot drive. I haven't got a licence. You have to have a vehicle to get around, and I don't have that, but first you gotta know how to drive to get there. So I'm stuck. Yeah, I'm stuck there; cannot get over that fence.

I was always in the country, never knew what a town was or a city was, so contacting places like this was not ...I didn't know where to start.

Mum didn't have kindergartens or preschool for us to go to, living so far away from town.

School was a place where I didn't really go ...Coming from the country to school we used to bike 10km till we got to the main road. Picked up by a bus drove inwards to ... and ...Yeah, we didn't know what we were there for.

I live all that way out of town. My mum had a car and then the repo man came.

I had a push bike and by the time I'd ...I'd rung up to say I've got a flat tyre and this and that's gone wrong, and I might be late, they said, "Are you coming in, or are you going to be late?" and it's, "Well, I'll just skip today then".

I used to belong to Wanganui District Library, but I found that moving around Wanganui got too much. If I had not enough funds to take the bus, and I had to walk, the distances just kept getting greater and greater so I gave up.

Transport would stop me coming. Because walking is quite harsh in the morning. If it's raining, I'm not going to walk in the rain.

I haven't been all week because my motorbike broke down and I couldn't get to the course.

We lived out in the backblocks, two or three hours away from town and that. I still don't like going into town much.

We've had to move closer into town so that I can just wheel home. It's quite a way to go, even in a taxi it costs like \$8.00 and that's after deductions – it usually costs about \$16.00.

I rang two bus companies and asked them if I was able to use their transport and they said, "Yes. We'll give you the three days for nothing and you can come up here".

I spent my last secondary years, since I was fourteen through to seventeen, at correspondence school due to the geographic location.

I seemed to have got homesick so I went home, and that was the worst thing I could've done. So ... I haven't sat anything so I'm not qualified.

Around one-eighth of respondents mentioned geographical isolation or lack of transport as undermining their ability to learn or to engage in training. Often this stemmed from economic barriers, with several people mentioning the cost of transport as prohibitive. A few people also mentioned geography as a barrier to employment, e.g., "Places like Wanganui, little towns like Wanganui and places like that, there's stuff-all work. Little shops have to close down 'cause a lot of people are leaving, 'cause they have to go somewhere else to get work".

Such comments about isolation and transport were incorporated as part of our arguments, in policy reports, for learning and employment strategies to address the whole person and all their needs for support, not just address their literacy as a functional skill. Transport issues in recruiting adult learners, with provision of free shuttle buses and the possibility of offering training modules within some outlying communities, perhaps through a mobile service, both need further consideration. Several people indicated that receiving training in their own community (with people and a context that they know and feel comfortable with) would better serve their learning needs.

Stigma Or Meaninglessness Around 'Literacy' Has Been A Barrier To My Learning



To me it's someone who may have difficulty with writing and reading. Literacy means to be illiterate. Starting again. That's what I thought.

Literacy? To me it's a problem of learning, comprehension, and understanding. People that haven't learned much in their lives, reading and all that.

I thought they're talking about dumb people. That's what I thought. I don't know what other people think. I don't know what that word means, but that's what it meant to me.

Lots of paper; lots of reading. That's what I think when you say the word 'literacy'. A whole lot of numbers, a whole lot of book work.

I don't know what literacy even means. I don't really understand that word.

Foundation skills. Foundation skills. Um. I'm not really sure on that. I'm not really sure what that says to me, not really.

It means if you need help. At school, I think if you were in the foundation classes it was like people that were a bit behind everybody else.

I don't know. I don't really get those two words. Like, literacy is talking and stuff, and foundation is, what's that? What do you mean by that?

Foundation skills? I've never heard of that word. I'd use interpersonal skills.

Literacy means, to me, just English. Just back-in-school English.

Oh literacy, dunno what it means. I have no idea. I wouldn't have a clue. It's just a word to me. Honestly, it doesn't mean anything.

One of them will come here and go back and tell his five mates who are the same and they're going to say, "Oh, you sissy", or "You're silly", or whatever. But they don't understand. They say to me, "Dumb people go there". But it's not, aye?

Don't really talk about it too much to someone else. Someone asks what I'm doing now, I just say I'm playing around with cars.

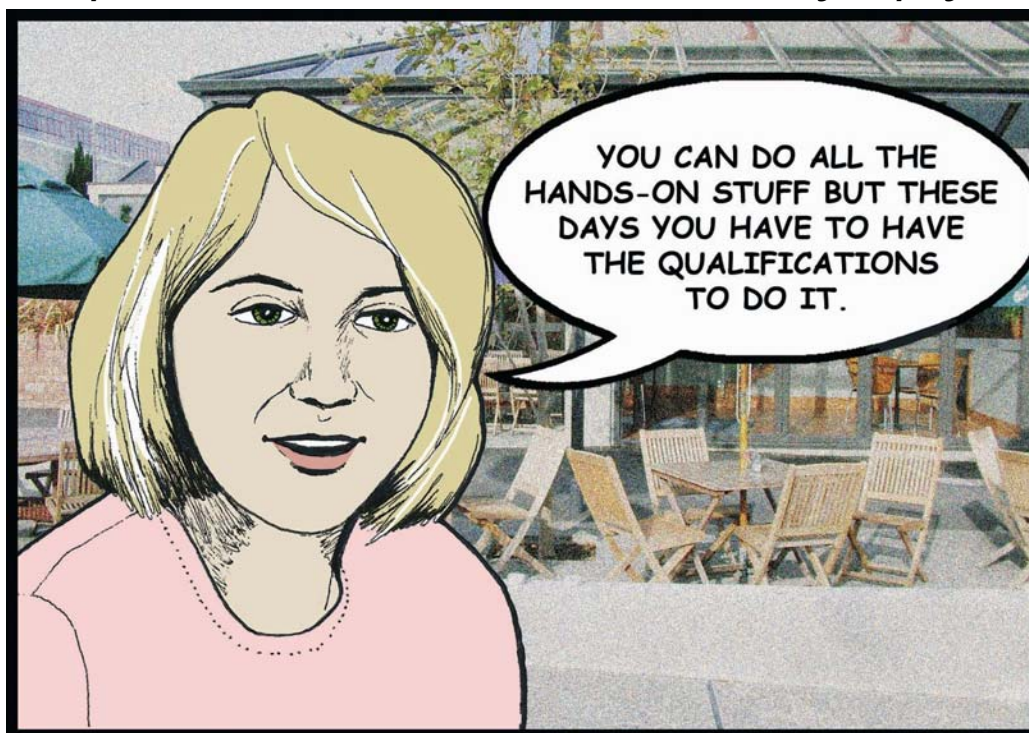
Many people told us that literacy was a negative term for them. They immediately connected 'literacy' with 'illiteracy' or learning problems of some kind. They felt implicitly judged by the very word itself, which seemed off-putting, officious, or long-winded. Some felt the stigma associated with literacy training so strongly that it had prevented them from joining a course, or now made them conceal from others their participation in training.

Many other people could put forward no answer to the question of what literacy means. The term was meaningless for them and did not relate to their lives or their needs in any way. Other respondents perceived literacy as meaning strictly '3R' type functional skills. Although some respondents saw literacy as extending slightly to include comprehension, or computer literacy, few if any perceived literacy as including multiple strengths or a wide range of life and employment skills. In later interviews, people were asked whether 'foundation skills' had any greater meaning for them than 'literacy'. It too was perceived as largely meaningless.

These comments point to major problems with 'literacy' as a term and as a brand. They suggest the impossibility of marketing 'literacy' courses to potential participants as something that will provide multi-faceted life and communication skills, because the term literacy itself has negative connotations. Neither literacy nor foundation skills connect in participants' minds with what is actually currently on offer from training providers or with where they want to go with their lives. As a result, marketing of courses should be done by those best qualified to speak in language that will make sense to other potential participants, and who can explain the benefits in real terms; current or former participants.

Barriers to Employment

A Requirement For Qualifications Is A Barrier To My Employment



It's a shame that we still can't go and get a job without the questions about what qualifications we have. I think practical things are as good as theory and some people are more skilled at practical things than they are at theory.

It's hard to get into schools, to get a teacher aide job, because I'm quite experienced but I'm not qualified.

Anything that is done now, like ... you've got to have a certificate for everything now. It's like an agreement. You've got to sign on the dotted line. In the old days you said you're going to do something for a break, a shake of the hand, and that's it. That was an agreement. Now you've got to have it in black and white.

I have not had a job in four years because I cannot get a job 'cause of my, what was it, my qualification – I haven't got it, I have not got that qualification. And I've tried to tell that to people but they don't understand.

Pretty much all employers do is they look at you, they look at your paper work and they go, "Oh, nah. Sorry, we can't employ you". But you might actually have skills that aren't on paper. Just like me. I can, like, I've built most of those; most of those desks. I built most of the lockers in this place. I've made so much stuff.

You look for jobs in the paper now and you've got to have at least a basic skill. Not in your head. You might know how to go and do a job, but you've got to have it down in black and white now. Even labourers, they even have to sit an exam now. You've got to have some sort of certificate now to say you've done a course on how to be a fucking labourer. I don't believe it. In a way, I find that insulting.

You've got to further your education to become something that you want to be. If you don't have the skills to do it or no qualifications, you just don't have a hope in hell to do anything. I've realised that with some of the jobs that I've applied for. Like, "Are you still at school?" "No. I'm on a course." "No, sorry, we don't want you."

I always wanted to work in the Takeaway Bar behind the counter ... and plus behind the bar, in the pubs ... those type of jobs I like to do, I love to do it, yeah. But to do all that, you gotta sit some course, like ah, food-wise, you know when you work in the kitchen you gotta have your certificate ... and when you work behind the bar, the same thing.

I've been a machinist all my life. Now that I got laid off, I just cannot get back into the workforce. There's no jobs out there for me, because I do not qualify for anything.

I miss out on a lot of jobs 'cause I don't have my licence. Even though I drive better than a lot of people I know who have got their licences.

I've been trying for six years to get a job, but no one will employ me ... I'm either under qualified or too qualified. 'Cause they want somebody who knows nothing, or they have to have at least Level 1. And I don't have that. I'm in-between.

I knew that you had to have a bit of paper because that's the way the system works. If you don't have a qualification, "Sorry, we want somebody that's got some form of qualification".

Around a quarter of respondents said that a requirement for formal qualifications, further qualifications, or specific qualifications ('a piece of paper') had been or was still a barrier to employment for them or others. Many indicated that they were skilled in the tasks required for a particular job but the need for qualifications testifying to that skill kept them out of employment, because they felt they were not skilled in the tasks required to get the certificate.

I've Experienced Health Or Physical Barriers To Employment



I asked the hospital if I could become a Nurse Aide. They knew about my epilepsy, being un-controlled grand mal, and said, 'Sorry, we're not going to take you on.' 'Okay,' I said, 'but that's what I want to do.'

My doctor has said to me not to come off the invalids' benefit. So has my neurologist. Because that's pushing myself, too far, too much.

Even though I passed the course practical, I wasn't allowed to do it because of my health. I had a job all lined up for me.

I just wanted to be a policeman, but then I contacted the recruiting staff and they said I have to have good eyesight, and my eyesight's poor. Yeah. So I have to have massive eye surgery to fix it – about \$4000 to fix. I have to get a job and save up before that.

I got into a car accident about three years ago and that affected my work. I had a head injury and I couldn't go back to work.

Because of health reasons I've got to find the sort of job that is not going to put too much stress and pressure on me.

When I've been outside too long I just faint ... I faint, if not I get really crook, so I'd rather have inside work ...

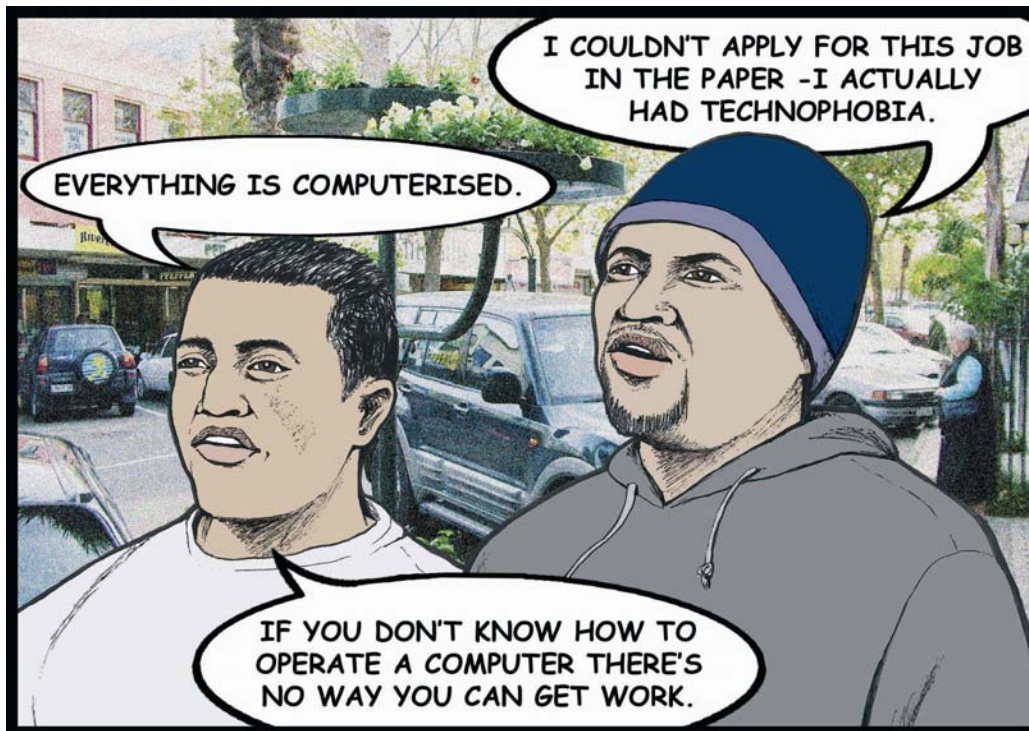
I've got an illness where I can't stand too long in any particular place or walk too far. I cannot stand on my feet too long.

I can't sit for too long. Sometimes I can't sit on a chair for more than two hours. Sometimes as little as half an hour.

Many people said that a health or physical condition is a barrier to their employment. Mental illness was a major employment barrier for some, and was not described as well understood or adequately catered for in the workplace. Another recurring theme was that health conditions that prevent repetitive postures, whether sitting or standing, were a barrier to employment.

Some of these physical barriers could be overcome in workplaces where jobs are structured to involve a variety of postures or movements, and a range of tasks, rather than either continual sitting or standing. This also relates to employers seeing the workplace as a learning environment and developing employees so that they are skilled in many tasks rather than just one. Currently, these comments suggest that many employers are largely unable or unwilling to cater for these physical requirements.

Technology Is A Barrier To Employment For Me



No manual jobs out there now because everything is computerised.

There were ads coming in the paper and I knew that I had to not apply because I was not conversant with the computers. I actually had technophobia. Anything new and it appeared in front of me, I just freaked, and couldn't cope with it.

I see a computer and people say, Oh look, a computer, and I'd literally run the other way. And I was going to miss out on an office coordinator kind of job because I could take it on but I knew I'd be bluffing them because I couldn't actually do it.

Every job I want they need somebody with computer experience and I didn't have it.

I got this dairy farm job, milking cows. And that only lasted two days. At least I managed to put the cows away by myself. I just didn't know how to work the rotary, because it was on a rotary - one of those things that go around slowly and I couldn't handle it. So, um, two days in the job and I didn't last. At least I tried it; gave it a go.

Now you need some skills on the computer before you can get a job, even a storeman's job.

And even when you think of check-out operators. There's the EFTPOS and there's this and that and you have to know computers ...

I'm missing out on the jobs because I haven't got computer skills, because I'd just sort of see a computer and run. It was just techno, I had technophobia.

The possibility of working nowadays without having computer skills is pretty well shot. Even the check-out girls, their things baffle me.

Around a fifth of people interviewed commented that either computer skills generally, or specific workplace technological skills (such as EFTPOS operation) have been or are a barrier to employment for themselves or others. More than one person said they had had 'technophobia'. These comments led us to recommend, in policy reports, that literacy training build skills in other areas via training in computing, and that computer skills be emphasised as a benefit when promoting training courses.

The Requirement For 3 Rs Has Been A Barrier To My Employment



I wanna get back in the workforce in the next year or so, but I cannot because of not being able to read and write.

I said to them, "I want a job". At the moment my reading and my spelling are my downfall. Working in a factory machinist's job, you don't need to read and write. Now, though, it's hard to get a factory job, as a machinist.

I spent a bit of time in a get-back-to-work thing, and some of the others couldn't even take that course, because they didn't know how to read and write. It's sad, nice guys.

They're not going to get a job if they can't even pass the driving exam because their literacy is so low. Get all the answers wrong and then they can't drive.

You don't need those reading and writing skills so much to do the job but to learn about all the regulations. You gotta know how to read and write for the regulations.

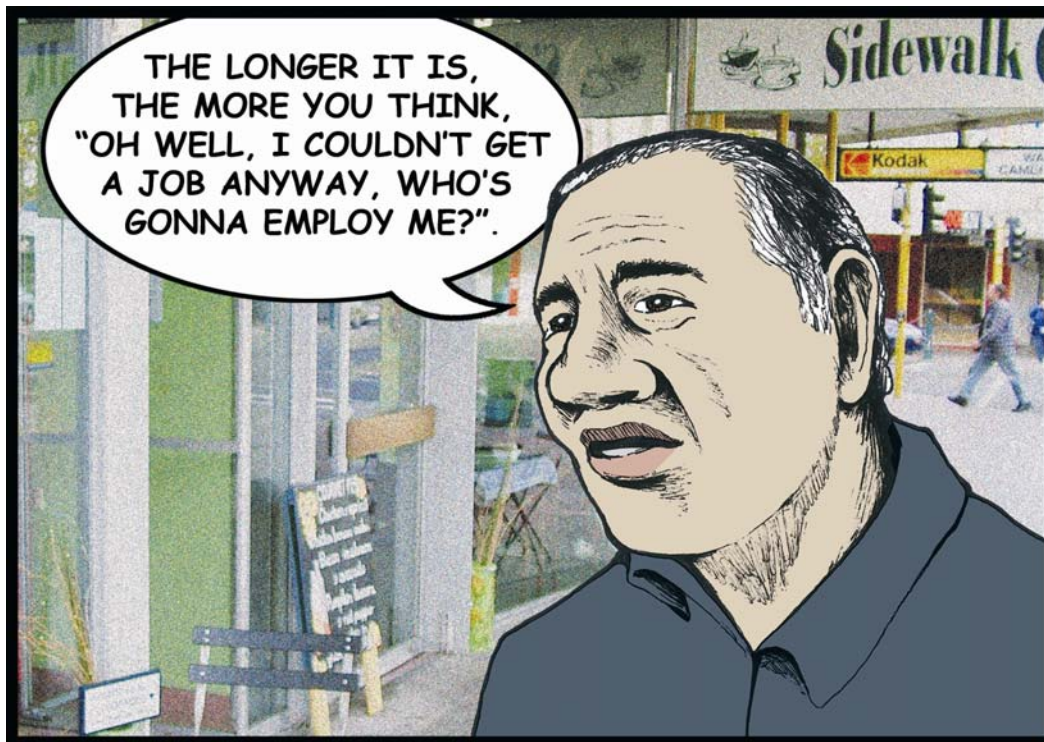
Dad told me that he was offered the position of overseer, he was offered it so many times and I said, "Why didn't you take it?" And he said, "It's because I can't read or write". And that was the one thing that stumped him. But he would never tell the boss. He didn't tell the boss. He just turned it down and said, "No, no. I'm happy here". But his heart was break-

ing because he really so wanted to do it. But he was torn between saying to his boss, "Look, I can't read or write", or he thought that he would be humiliated or whatever. But I mean, he got his licence. He had to, to drive the grader, but he couldn't do any more than that.

I was interested in truck driving but was put off because you have to fill in forms and I was put off by the writing.

About one-eighth of people said that a requirement for traditional 3R literacies in almost every job has been or is a barrier to employment for themselves or others. Not infrequently, people commented that, when at school, they did not see any connection between reading, writing, maths, and their future needs for life or employment. We believe that people with first-hand experience of such situations have valuable knowledge to offer others who are not yet in adult training, including, for example, through school visits.

My Confidence Has Been A Barrier To Employment



I find it hard to go out and talk to people and stuff like that so, that's a lot of the reason I haven't got a job. I'd be too scared. I thought I was useless.

And even just to get the confidence to be able to ...I mean, a till would scare the living day-lights out of me because of having to remember code in EFTPOS and if you make a mistake, how to get back out of it. It's just getting the confidence even if you still have to learn how to operate one of those. It's having the confidence that you know that the thing's not going to blow up in your face if you make a mistake.

I'm frightened to succeed and frightened of failing. I suppose it's a vicious thing that sort of traps you in that cycle ...

You apply for jobs and you never hear back and that can get disheartening.

I know it's hard for people. You know, even for me at times of thinking, "Oh, I want to get a job". And I start feeling down. And I can understand people. You know, and you say, "Oh have a positive attitude". But sometimes you ... Probably people get to a certain stage. It's hard to have a positive attitude unless you are amongst positive people. Because it's hard when you're, when you're with people who are like yourself that are really trying to get somewhere, and you're trying to do the same thing, just get a job or create your own.

I was so scared about going to get jobs after 20 years.

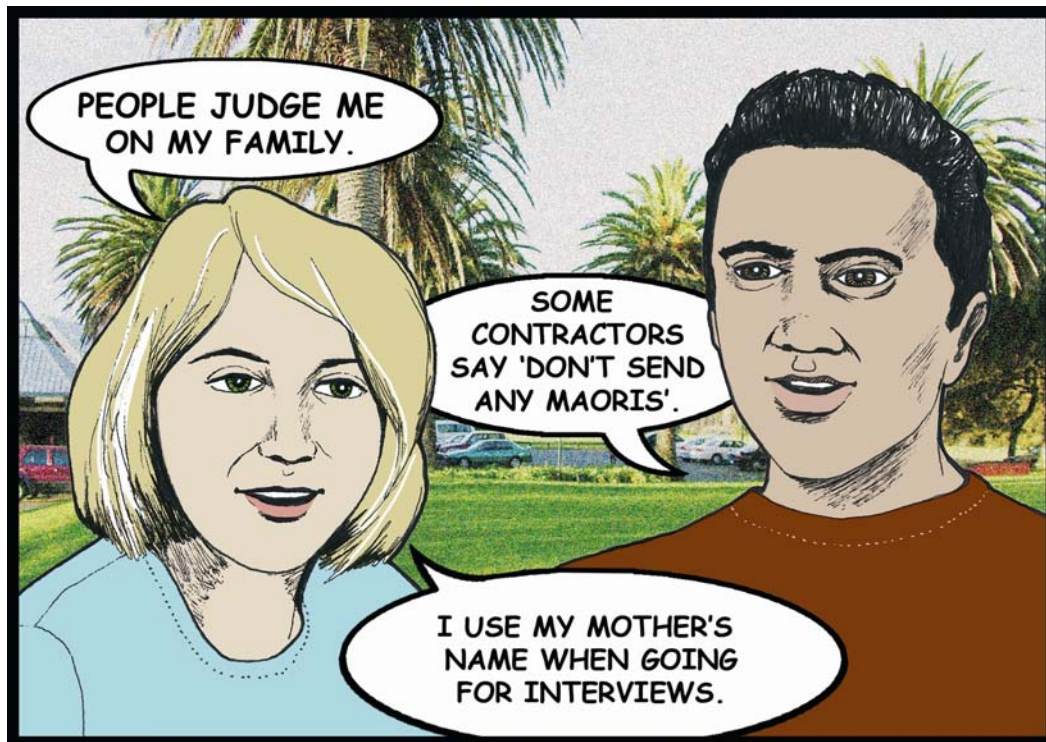
I got the nursing appointment. I was supposed to go for an interview, and deep down inside me the old fears of what I'd learned in my twelve years at school came to the forefront and said, "I won't be able to do this. They'll throw maths at me. I won't be able to take a temperature. I won't be able to do this. I won't pass", in my head.

Some people indicated that jobseekers' confidence, or their own confidence, was an enormous barrier to employment. Many of these same people had their confidence greatly enhanced by participating in adult training, particularly training in pre-employment skills.

Adult training needs to be more clearly marketed as offering ways to overcome lack of confidence. The first hand stories from those who have experienced this change in their confidence levels are a valuable resource to use in such marketing.

Work and Income NZ might look in more depth at ways to offer confidence building to the long-term unemployed before exposing them to a cycle of applying and being rejected. This could include mentoring from someone who has been in the same situation but who has been able to increase their confidence through learning and has moved into employment.

Discrimination Has Affected My Employment



There's so much racism in this country now, more than what there was about 10 years ago, you know? I find that.

I decided to try and make a go of trying to find work. But it was pretty hard, pretty hard, 'cause not many people take people with criminal convictions. There's are a lot of people I know that can't get jobs because they might have a bad record.

I got sick of that job 'cause there was just too much racism there.

Well ...there were certain things because of my family background that reflect on me even now. Like sometimes I may not get a job because of ..."you're so and so's daughter".

They'll ask why are you on a benefit and sometimes people can be quite nasty. I've been to a couple of job interviews and they'll ask you why are you on the benefit. You tell them the truth, and some of the people's reactions are not very nice, not nice at all.

My family is known all over New Zealand which is quite awkward everywhere because they just think, "Oh, what a bad family you have", etc.

I see so many people out there with huge student loans, who've gone back as adult students thinking that if they get qualifications they can get jobs. But let's face it, once you're 50, nobody wants you.

Now, you can talk about ageism as much as you like, but boy it is strong out there. Because they think ...and I can understand it ...they think you are past that.

So if I at 55 had to get some job starting at the bottom, getting abused by people, that's not me, you know, I'd find that too difficult.

I think there's difficulties around a lot of re-employment issues for, not just older men particularly, but older women. I do get a sense, though, that it's harder for older men often to re-enter the workforce if they have been made redundant because there's a whole pile of issues. There still seems to be a strong sense from many men that they do need to be the provider and I think that is an ingrained thing. I speak to quite a few young men now and there's still that sense that that tradition is still really strong although our social climate has changed. It's still there.

Discrimination based on family affiliation cropped up as a barrier to employment. Several people mentioned racism and ageism as barriers to employment, and many people felt that employment decisions were made upon first appearances rather than skills or aptitude for the particular job. These comments indicate a social issue that is much broader than just literacy and employment, but one that is also integrally related to the concept of multiple literacies. A strengths-based culture (whether national, workplace, or school) will value people equally for their disparate abilities and look for ways to best harness those abilities.

The comments about a resurgence of racism led us to suggest that, at a wide social level, a renewed focus on strength through diversity might be helpful. Appropriate political leadership supported by targeted social marketing is needed to refresh social beliefs of respecting difference and valuing different ways to contribute to shared goals.

My Experience Level Is A Barrier To Employment



They said "Oh you can go and they'll write your CV up for you". But I had nothing to put on it, and that was the only offer they gave me.

I've been looking for jobs and no-one will hire me because I don't have any sort of experience. I think experience these days is a must-have, even though you have to start off somewhere. They say, "What jobs have you had?" Well, I've been on unemployment benefits for nearly 20 years or longer, so ...Jobs are hard to come by. If you've got no skills that they need, people these days aren't prepared to teach you, to train. They want someone to move straight into the job and that's it.

Experience means a lot to people especially if they know you've dealt with certain cases before. Every job I want they need somebody with computer experience and I don't have it.

For some people, lack of experience has been or is a barrier to employment. Others indicated that work experience gained through their adult training overcame this barrier. The prevalence of these comments indicates a need for traineeships that provide employers who are willing to give an inexperienced person a start with a free or low-cost staff member provided they fulfil certain training obligations to the employee.

My Family Commitments Have Affected My Employment



I could only work until 1 o'clock, because child subsidies don't allow me to do full time work, which I found really hard. I had a good employer, and she was fine with me working until 1 o'clock, but I wasn't happy. I wanted to keep working 'til 5 and I had no extra help from Work and Income for my son to get looked after full time, so it put me in a position where I thought well, I am working, that's good, we're getting this extra money, but I am not getting anywhere in life doing what I am doing.

After leaving school, I did two courses and two different jobs, but since then I've been a full-time mother, and I put my energy into my two children. I had a child and from then on I just tended to him, really.

Several people said family commitments are a barrier to employment for them. Again, these and similar comments led us to emphasise the importance of looking at literacy and employment in terms of the whole person and their support context.

We suggest childcare subsidies to enable parents to study or work need revisiting in government policy. Discrimination issues also cropped up once more—again, we see this as indicating a wider social issue to do with promoting the value of family-friendly workplaces and valuing employees with balanced family/work lives, in order to create a strengths-based social culture.

I Think Attitudes Are A Barrier to Employment



A healthy attitude. If you've got a stinking attitude, you're not going to get any job.

If you can't relate to people then you're not going to get a job.

If you go into an interview going 'phhhhwttt', you're not going to get a job. But if you go in with the attitude, a reasonably good attitude—most people have a reasonably good attitude—well then you're likely to be in the running, aren't you, to get a job?

It's easy for them just not to do anything and to go and steal and rob. Their friends say to them, "Oh you are a hero if you go and stab someone. We will give you a Mongrel Mob jacket if you go stab someone".

I think they need motivation first. Like, they go, "Here, I'll get a job", but they're not actually moving. They need to believe in themselves, like, "Yes, I can do that, but I need to be better at it". But they don't seem to go any further. They don't take the next step. They seem to get stuck on the same step and don't want to take the next one, and, oh, that's most of the adults I know.

If you don't have a good attitude towards people, well then that boss ain't going to give you the job.

There's so many people out there and they're just so lazy and they don't know how to work, they think they can go to Work and Income or go to a job and just make money without putting in any work at all.

You see some kids out there and they're like "Oh I'm going to be the greatest jockey ever" and they don't know a thing about anything and you can't tell them ... These kids they don't want to learn and they don't care but they still want to get to the top and they can't get to the top without starting at the bottom, but they don't see that.

I've been brought up with those good morals of respect. People that are older than you, they know more, they've seen more. You look at younger people today, they're overconfident. That's just my own personal belief.

A small handful of people suggested that jobseekers' attitudes were a barrier to employment. These kinds of comments were often other-directed, for example, comments that others in the community lacked work ethic, or were easily led by peer pressure.

Blaming comments such as this were in the minority in the overall spectrum of the interviews, but still indicate barriers that jobseekers may face, which can include stigmatisation and value judgements around the reasons for unemployment. Overall, the picture painted by the complexity of people's life stories was that the barriers to literacy and employment were complex, interlinked, and multi-faceted rather than attributable to a single cause such as 'attitude'.

Part Two: Pathways and Benefits

Pathways to, and Benefits From, Learning

My Motivation Or Goal Orientation Has Helped With My Learning



I wanted to learn new things so I could work towards what my goal is, which is to be a body cutter and stuff, and spray paint and airbrush.

I want a trade or something, yeah, that's why I'm here learning.

This course has ...Oh this is actually my second step into becoming what I want to be. I want to be a qualified carpenter and own my own business and stuff like that. It's actually just, I don't know, given me a bit of a kick start into life pretty much.

I dream of being an Early Childhood Development Teacher, like working with autistic kids and stuff, 'cause I've done that with my little brother.

What I'm learning, I don't want it to be just, to be used in just a job – J.O.B. – you know? I want it to be used in something that can make a difference to people or to an employer, to get job satisfaction. That's, I can only speak for myself, that's what I want to do. I don't want to just have a job. I know I can go and get a job now, today. I know that. But I don't want to go back there again, you know. And it's good money. But that's all it is – a job – I don't want to go to a job. And that's why I'm learning.

I kind of want to be a counsellor because of what I've grown up in. I had a mother in jail, and a father in a gang, and lots of stuff around me. Drugs, sex, rock'n'roll, and arguing and violence and stuff like that. So I just want to help people who have been in my circumstances.

I want to either work for someone or a company that I can add something to, value to. And people, that I can add value to, for the company. Or, if not, to work for myself to make use of what I've learnt, to be a success in my own business.

Being in business. The goal is to be in business.

I've conquered one dream, and that was to become a teacher aide, and work in a learning centre. And my other dream is to be a writer, and a poet.

I thought maybe I should come back and get a few qualifications and start doing something that I really enjoy doing rather than just for the money.

I'm doing this course to get my reading and writing capability up and try to get a job that I'll actually enjoy, not like sweeping streets or anything.

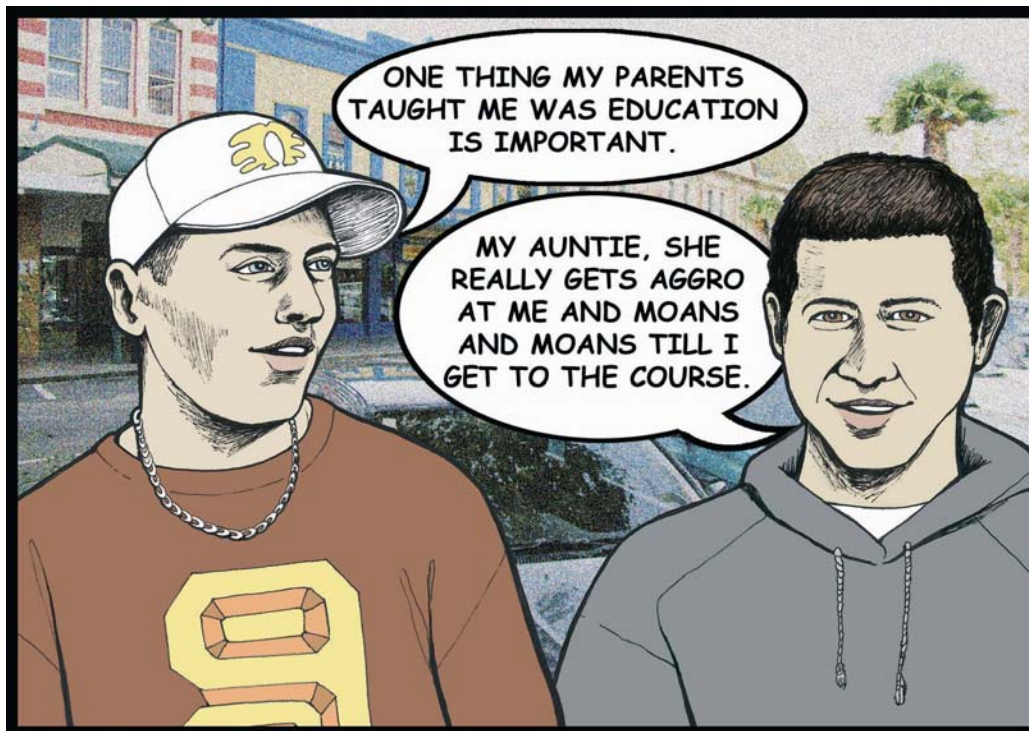
My foster child, I couldn't help him really at school, so I thought, I've got to learn how to help him, to learn how to spell, how to do apostrophes and all this.

I actually joined this course to teach my son something, instead of him teaching me.

Most people interviewed said that finding an internal motivation or goal orientation had provided them with a clear pathway to literacy learning. Goals included identifying a career such as nursing or the army, wanting a higher paying or more enjoyable job, proving to themselves that they could complete a particular course, or wanting to help others. Sometimes helping other people meant helping other family members, such as children with homework, and sometimes it meant helping in the community or helping other adult learners.

These were the goals that people were excited about and found meaningful. Focusing on these goals helped people keep going when work was difficult or conditions challenging. Not one person said their goal was to 'become literate' for its own sake. For these reasons, marketing for literacy courses requires a focus on the goals that people themselves find meaningful rather than attempting to impose abstract goals.

My Family Environment Has Supported My Learning



We had plenty of books, encyclopaedias and things, and the town library here, and my parents, they would help. Learning was exciting at home. It wasn't stopped.

My family were very supportive. Personally I didn't feel it was a big deal to be coming on a teacher aide course, but my family thought it was a big deal. They said they were proud of me for coming to do this.

My parents always helped. If I ever needed help my dad would help me even though how busy he was, he would put whatever he was doing down and come and help me. He could be on the roof or something but he'd come down and help.

My nana will look after my kids. Like today, I've got an English sitting for this unit, sixth form English on top of this, so the kids will go to my nan's. It's neat.

It's made me believe, with the support from other people, that I can do it. Like, just in the last year or so, my partner brings home newspapers, and he reads out the words, the questions to the crosswords, and if I know the answer, I tell him the answer. And if my daughter knows it she tells him. And we sit there and do that every week. Sometimes more than once a week. And I think, man, I can do something I didn't know before.

I've got a ride into town to get here and I've got encouragement, just positive remarks from my family.

My mum said that because she didn't get the education that she wanted that she wants us to definitely get the education so she's got children to be proud of and she doesn't want to see us following in her footsteps. She wakes me up every morning. "You've got to get up". She makes me breakfast.

My grandmother pretty much laid down the law – she said you better go to school or go to polytech or wherever. So I went!

It was my sister really, in Wellington. I got sick and I went down. She said, "Well, you're going to try something new".

A cousin came around. She sat down with me. She said, "Come on. I'll teach you". So for hours she used to come and teach me how to do these things.

My parents didn't have the education, and we might not have had the money, but we had a lot of aroha. We had the love, and I had the motivation and the guidance and it was only because they hadn't learned and they wanted to learn.

My daughter's teaching me on the computer at home, and my granddaughters help me.

Everyone said I could do it and I was like, "No, I can't". My foster parents knew I was ready so they organised it and everything.

I had no idea what I was getting myself into. It was my mother's idea at the time.

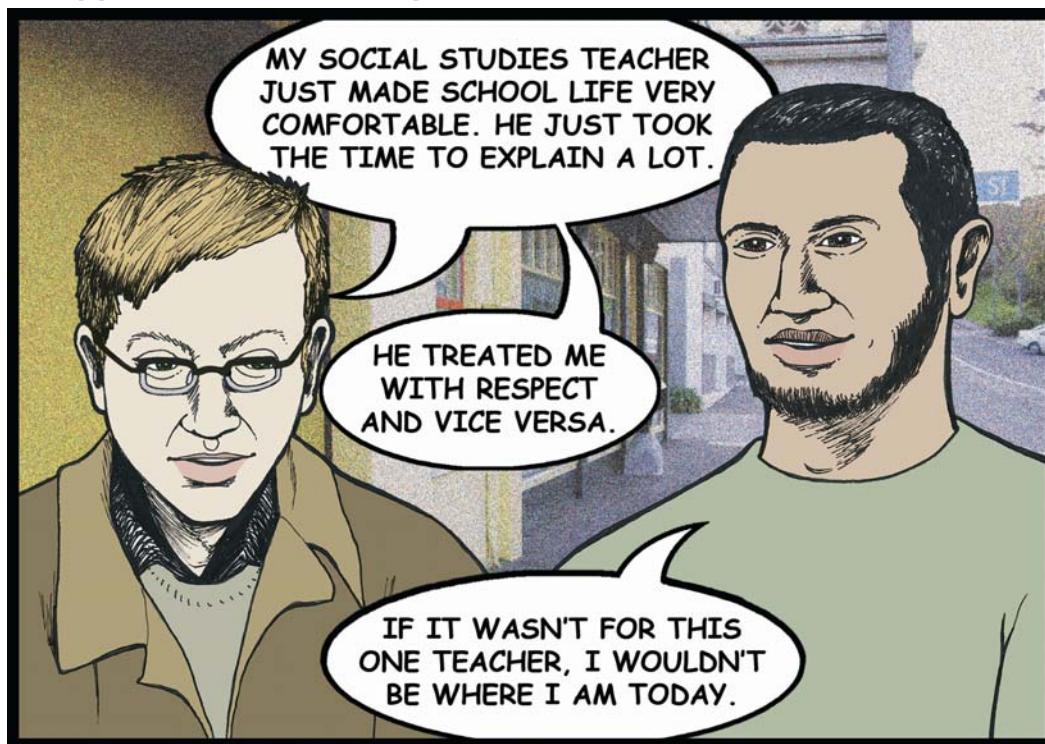
My mum helped with homework. So did my dad. So did my brother.

My whole life I've been told that I'm going to be nothing but a bum. I'm not going to do anything. I'm going to get no education. So I'm proving my whole entire family wrong, just to shove it in their faces, and walk out and leave, and have more money than they could dream about.

Around two-thirds of the people we spoke with said family environment or family support had helped them with learning either at school or in adult training. In most cases this was positive, due to encouragement to learn, or a positive parental or other family role model whom they emulated, such as older siblings. Also important was a home culture that supported learning with learning tools provided in the home and help with homework.

In a few cases negative experiences at home meant that learning outside the home became attractive because it provided an escape. Sometimes proving oneself outside the home was a determined counter-reaction to criticism and put-downs by family. Initiatives such as 'Team-Up' are valuable. These encourage families to see home and school as partners in children's learning, and provide suggestions for supporting family literacy. Also needed is a whole-of-family approach to adult learning.

A Supportive Teacher Helped Me To Learn



When she would see something, she would actually point it out and say, "You're the best singer", which I was, "And you can do the solo part". She would do that. She actually ...she was very fair, but she didn't hold the strap over us. So I learned.

We had a new teacher, and she was awesome. She was just so jovial and I started painting again and stuff like that. She just made things interesting. She made science interesting. She made everything interesting.

I think their teaching style, it helped you and you, you enjoyed, I enjoyed the subjects and they were prepared to help you.

If you got caught doing something that you weren't supposed to they wouldn't tell you off ... they wouldn't give you a detention or anything, they would just, you know, like if they caught you smoking or something they'd just, you know, "Put that out and come and play sport", or something.

It was just the character of them. They weren't so grumpy and all that. They were pretty laid back. If you didn't know something, they'd really help you.

The good teachers were willing to help you. My favourite teacher would have been the head of the maths department. He reminded me of Dad because of his toughness and his hardness and his discipline. But at the end of the day he was still a good teacher. He was a straight teacher. He called a spade a spade and that's the way that it would be.

It's the way they would relate to me. They would take the time and sit beside me and talk to me about different things. It was never an intimidation. It was always ...it was more like a friend. They were like a friend and you really felt like they cared. And that was really important. It was fitting in. Being able to fit in and having a teacher who really encouraged you and motivated you without making you feel ...I mean, they never put you down.

The way they did the lessons was more interesting. I'm quite a visual person and they were aware of everybody's different learning styles – one particular teacher especially understood that. So yeah, a good teaching style, very kind, and they have interesting things to talk about, could answer your questions, and were really interested in what they're doing.

It was the way they talked to us. They're Pākehā, but the way they talked to us, we would just look at them like they were our nana and granddad. You couldn't get smart to them and just run away, which happens in schools. But these teachers you just had that respect because of the way they talked to you. It just felt different.

They knew what I was like and if I didn't understand they could tell by just looking. They'd look at all the class and I'd be sitting there trying to figure it out and then they'd come up to me and say, "Need a hand?" I'd be, "Oh no, I'm all right". And they'd be, "Oh no, I'll sit down and help you do it", anyway. So, they could read me like a book pretty much. They put some time in. Whatever time they could.

More than half the people interviewed mentioned a teacher or other mentor in a teaching-type role who had provided motivation to learn. Especially frequent were statements that 'good' teachers and mentors were those who listened, who showed an interest, who helped when questioned, and who, although firm and insisting upon high standards, were 'fair'. A sense of mutual respect was important to many respondents in their assessment of why some teachers had inspired them while others had de-motivated them.

There was a strong sense, emerging clearly from the interviews, that people felt even just one single person taking a genuine interest in their life had made an enormous difference to their interest in learning and ability to reach their learning goals. This first-hand feedback needs to be used in teacher training, and more formal methods should be investigated for instituting mentoring support in schools and within communities. These voices show that everyone needs opportunities to feel respected in the school environment and that feeling respected has a lasting impact.

Personal Recommendation To Join A Course Got Me Learning



My auntie, she's in a course at the moment and she was telling me.

School told me about it, and I asked Work and Income about it, 'cause a couple of my friends used to be on it, so I knew from them.

I've seen people and I know that they know I was a bit slow and I say, "Bro, I go up to this place up the road. Come up with me and we'll have a look, aye".

My mate went to it and he said I should go. Actually, I talked to a couple of mates about it.

I actually heard about it through an old boss. I lost my job there so I asked him what he thought I should do, and he suggested I come here and do the course.

There are a lot of people out there ...I've had people come up to me and say, "Gee, you've changed". And I've said, "Yeah. I've been going to the learning centre". "Where's that?" You know?

A lot of people I know knew about this course or have been on it at some point.

Companies, the people that we're working for, could show a bit more interest in it, and tell people how good it is and people might start coming here as well.

I actually suggest to a lot of people to come here, 'cause usually people are talking about, "Oh, I don't like school. I'm gonna leave and just do nothing". I'm like, "Come to our course, man. You get certificates out of it. You get things out of this course which you don't do at school. You get a lot more freedom and you're a lot happier". Quite a lot of people I know have come onto this course and done it, so yes, I have brought a few people in.

It was actually my son's girlfriend who saw it in the paper and she was thinking of doing it and I said to her, "Can you bring the cut out from the paper and I'll give it a ring?"

It was my old best friend, she was going on it, and 'cause I didn't know what I was going to do I talked to her and she said, oh you should do this, so I thought well I might as well.

A week after I joined this course, I told my dad about it and he wanted to jump on it and so I came back to the course the following week to ask, "Are there any more spare seats and that because my father wants to jump on it now?" And she was, "Oh, sorry, we're full. You're going to have to tell him to sign up next year". And so he's ready to sign up next year and he even thinks it's pretty cool.

I told my mate, if he wants to jump on it ...I've told a lot of people, even strangers I talk to outside on the table. I give them all the topics and stuff like that and they're just blown away and they're, "Oh, I might think about that course next year". "Give it a go, man. You've got nothing to lose. It's cool. It's a good course".

Around half of the interviewees mentioned some form of word-of-mouth endorsement as important in their decision to join an adult literacy training course. Word-of-mouth functioned either as crucial back-up for something they had seen or heard elsewhere (newspaper, Work and Income, etc.) or as their primary reason for joining. More than two-thirds of word-of-mouth endorsements were from current or former training participants. One participant accurately acknowledged the level of word-of-mouth recruitment: "They've got to get themselves here themselves, but half the time it's by word-of-mouth".

Many people said that they were now themselves sending the message out to their friends and communities by word-of-mouth about the benefits and positive atmosphere on training courses. This word-of-mouth endorsement needs to be made more frequent and officially recognised. Current and former training participants should be offered actual part-time marketing and recruitment work to attend schools, communities, Work and Income, and other places, and offer information about training and how to join to potential participants.

I've Gained Confidence From Literacy Learning



It's improving my confidence in talking, speaking out. I used to just sit back, and do nothing. Now I'm speaking out. You actually feel quite smart, too, in here. I'm feeling quite intelligent actually. I've proved to me I can do things. The benefit of it is, you keep your head up, don't drop it down, when you go out on that street.

Acceptance, I suppose. Acceptance that I wasn't a dummy anymore. You know how, when you're at school, when you're younger, you don't know this, and you don't know that, and oh what a dummy, and blah, blah, blah - not that I was ridiculed much, but I knew that I didn't have a lot of aptitude for things. But through the tutors, sitting down and explaining things, or putting it in a new way, saying it in a new way, and explaining things to me, I didn't feel like a dummy. I felt as if this was possible. That I'm just part of the class and it's all possible, that every single one of us can do this. We can do it.

By crikey learning you get a buzz you really do. I went out for a job and I was so confident it must have shone out like anything. I've breezed through addition, subtraction. It's not a problem. I'm getting a lot of pleasure in actually breezing through the maths that I thought was going to be a big stumbling block. I can see the progress I'm making and I can see the achievements I'm getting and that I comprehend. Mate, I'm up there. I'm not frightened anymore.

Coming here has built my confidence, because of the atmosphere in this place. Other people see that I've become much more confident, much more positive about myself, because I'm learning something and I feel better about myself.

Nearly every day, I see something new and exciting happening within this class for me. It's made me feel a lot more confident, in fact it has given me confidence to actually go find a job.

It's making a big difference. It's making me more confident and it's keeping me busy and I feel like I've accomplished something at the end of the day. At school, some days I just wouldn't go. It was, no point really. But here, it's like, I'm doing very well, might as well keep it up.

It's the best thing I've ever done. I'm just building in stature every day, 'cause I know I can do it. I can do it. I can do it. So there's nothing out there that I can't do, if I give it a go. I can go as far as I want. Doesn't matter how long it takes me - but I will get there.

I'm just loving it. I'm just flying through ...And it's just so incredible. I didn't believe that I would ever be able to do something like that and yet I've done it, and I think, "Wow". It was huge 'cause they could see where and what I hadn't learned. And once they triggered it, it just flooded, yeah, it was just magic. Really was.

I realise there's a lot more people in the same situation as I am. It actually gave me a lot of confidence. I didn't realise that I was so capable, I think. It was really great for my self-esteem, as well as educational. I have a lot more confidence, a lot more encouragement and a lot more hope for the future.

It's brilliant. You know, it's given a person ...This is it: It gives them a doorway to walk through and feel they're okay, rather than being out in the cold all the time and having all the sort of thoughts about, "I'm no good". Now, you open up the door, you come in, and it's a world where you're allowed to explore things you never thought before or were scared of.

When I came to the course, and people gave me that extra help, and I started believing in myself that I could do it ...nobody can take that away from me. Just that little push ...I've gained a lot more confidence than I ever did at any schools that I ever went through. You know, it's given me encouragement and some, even hope. Yeah, it's given me a lot of hope.

The standout benefit mentioned by the greatest number of respondents from participation in training was enhanced confidence, and a sense of achievement and motivation. About half of the interviewees mentioned these benefits from their training. This was almost twice as many respondents as mentioned the next most common benefit, improved interpersonal, family, and workplace communication.

I've Experienced Better Family Or Interpersonal Communication As A Result Of Learning



It's making me more happy and making the kids happier. With my middle child, I'm making him talk more.

My life is just, I don't know. I thought I was running pretty high with my ability to get on with people, but now it's just, it's right over the top.

If my daughter comes home with a problem, I can sort it. I don't need to go 'aarrggg' which I would have done if I hadn't learned the literacy.

I learnt to be more tolerant around people because in a confined area with a lot of different people - and some fair got up my nose - it's just a matter of learning to, "Okay. I've got this objective in mind. I'll put up with you as long as I need to, then I don't have to see you after that, so that's cool". And being able to step into the shoes of others and see from a different point of view, as opposed to just your point of view.

Even my partners and my kids say I'm more relaxed and a lot more relaxed being in my new partnership. A lot of it is just things that I'm learning about myself. As I'm studying in class I'm applying it to me.

The course has helped me to open myself up more, be more aware of trusting my vulnerabilities with others sort of thing. And it's just something that I've always had trouble with but now it doesn't bother me. Take me or leave me. Up to you. It's what I think of myself that matters. I'm far more patient than I thought I was. And I'm capable of giving a lot more respect than I thought I could.

It's helped me settle in life. Settling in, sort of thing, instead of moving around too much from place to place. They helped me produce that feeling and atmosphere of being wanted and accepted, instead of tense.

They got me back here, to chat to others, the new ones, this year. I said to them, "You know, if you leave now, you really are cutting off your nose to spite your face, because you just learn so much about yourself, about discipline, about how to handle other people, how to speak to other people, how to learn to love yourself more, you know. How to find out what it is that's making you tick, because that's all involved in it as well". So I said that they would definitely be more intelligent and know a hell of a lot more by the end of the year if they stayed and made the effort.

I had problems last year with my own family. The final couple of months of the course was when everything in my family kind of turned to crap, and it was actually the course that helped me to get through a lot of the stuff, that I was dealing with outside of the school.

I've learnt a lot about getting along with people from this course. I used to be sort of a quiet person, not very outgoing. But meeting people here, I think I'm getting better at it.

Many people told us that their adult learning course had had spin-off communication benefits in other areas in their lives, such as improved interpersonal communication with partner, friends, or family. Many felt more relaxed and better equipped to problem-solve conflicts at work or home. Government agencies tackling issues such as family violence should consider 'joined-up' or multi-part approaches that include learning or training as an essential component of any solution. One policy-maker working in the area of family violence learned from one of our reports about the connections between literacy training and easier family communication. She told us that she now saw why frustration and aggression might be logical outcomes of feeling unable to express and be understood.

We hope that greater awareness of these connections will encourage a 'whole of person', or indeed 'whole of society' approach to a range of social problems from alcohol abuse to vandalism. These may sometimes be seen as problems to be 'punished' but may more helpfully be regarded as ways of communicating anger, frustration, and resistance when other channels for expression seem unattainable.

Pathways to Employment

My Adult Learning Course Led To Employment



If I hadn't found the course, I would still be unemployed. Or I would have found a job that was most probably sticking stamps on envelopes, and I wouldn't have been happy there.

By the time it got to the second term, and I started on my practicum, I already had a job. I knew that I wanted to finish my certificate first, and she was you know, quite happy for me to. I could have had a job there right there and then, or I could finish my certificate and go there next year, which is what I did.

I think it's credit to the course that everyone that did the course is fully employed.

I applied for two jobs and got both ...And then I had to choose which one I wanted. After going to this course it's just, yeah, beyond my wildest dreams.

It's opened up more avenues, for work, and it helps you on your way to getting a job. Gives you some of the qualifications that you need these days. And if you know what you actually want to do, they can suggest things for you so you can get qualifications for that job.

I also work here now, so it really helped me get a job. I work here part-time as well. It was really, really good for me, the course. The whole thing was just ...opened up so many doors.

I'm off the benefit, so that's a good thing. My partner and I both work part-time now, so that's enough for us to support ourselves. Before that, he just worked part-time, and I was a stay-at-home mum, and so that makes your self-esteem go up too.

By providing the employment skills for me and knowing what to do in the work situations, it just works way better than school.

I got a job after being at this course here. If I hadn't come here I might not have got the job. I might have got something through my past experience but not through knowledge, and I don't think I would have been anywhere near a computer or an office. I would have been far from the dreams of being happy going to work.

It's made me think that, yeah I could go out there and get a job. Now I can go up town and read the notice board that's there, or read the papers when there's jobs in the paper.

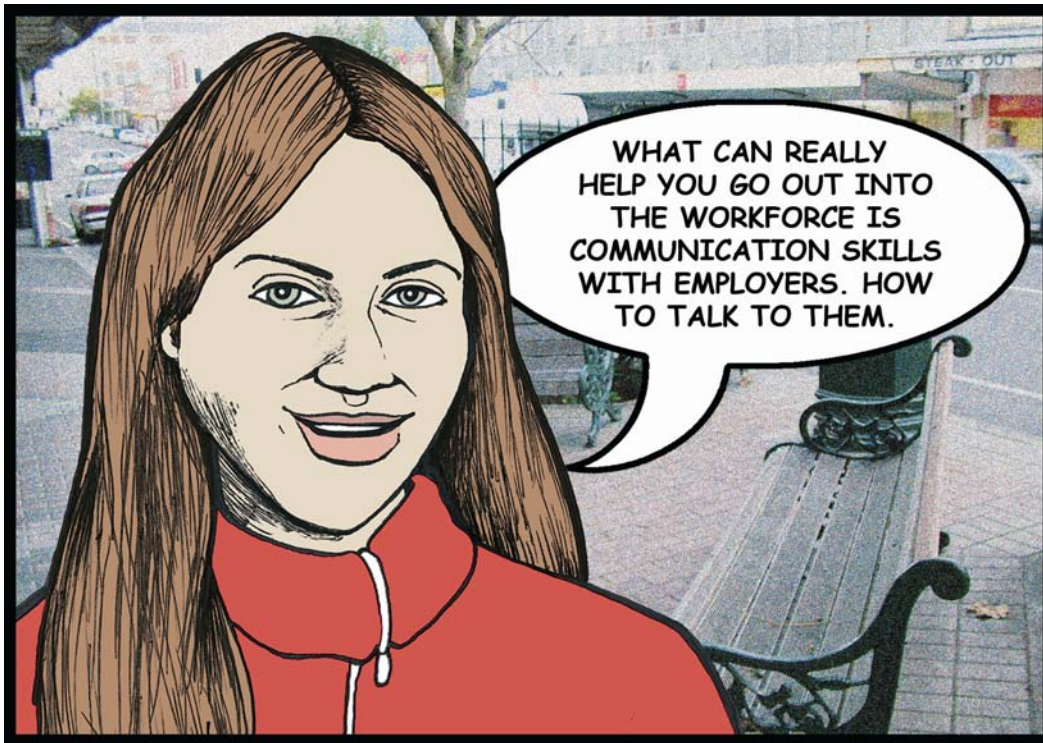
This is going to help me getting a job. Since I've been here I've actually learnt new things that I never learnt at school. We're learning employment contracts, health and safety, doing a CV, a whole range of different things that help us get employment. I'm applying for a job next week.

I'm gaining skills here, and they're actually work experience at the same time. I got my Level 2 Farming Certificate, and then I worked on a farm for about six months.

It opened the employment opportunities because it widened my field, because I couldn't do manual. That was my main life; always manual, outdoors, no written, no reading, nothing like that. I just wanted to work hard and come home satisfied. But when ACC surgeon said I couldn't do that any more, I went, "Oh dear". And they said, "Office". And I went, "Oh dear". And I had no skills with office. I had people skills, and I thought, "I need ...can I learn?" And when I went up there and asked if I could, if they could teach me, they were so positive. Of course they could teach me. And I'm going, "Yeah, right". And they could.

More than half the people interviewed said that they had obtained one or more jobs or expected to obtain a job in the near future as a direct result of their participation in adult learning courses. Sometimes this was because of direct assistance from a tutor or someone else on their course who put them in touch with employers who then offered them work. Other times it was less direct, because their confidence had been built to the point where they felt positive about presenting themselves to employers. Many were specifically learning job skills such as interviewing and curriculum vitae writing. Again, we recommend this key benefit of course participation be highlighted as a vital component of marketing the courses.

Communication Skills Lead To Employment



If you want to get a job you have to be a team person. Be able to cope with maybe criticisms and rejections and things like that. A good sense of humour. Be an approachable sort of person. People skills.

The most important one is social skills, obviously, for employment. Good communication skills.

The most important skills for getting a job are people skills. Communicating with other people, just getting it out there and making yourself known. Just great communication skills really.

Sense of humour is always on top of my list, because I had to learn it. I had to learn a sense of humour. That sounds funny. I had to understand what it was and just how powerful it can be. And it can be.

Communicating with others. Even if you don't particularly like someone, you still have to talk to them with respect and be caring and be understanding and things like that.

Listening skills. And everything else will follow. Usually does. Ask a lot of questions if you're not sure.

People skills. To be able to talk to people. Doesn't matter what you're doing. It doesn't matter whether you're behind a desk or in the background, you're still going to need ...Like even at the works, I had to relate to people, you know, your teammates or classmates, doesn't matter. And to get through the interview you have to be able to talk to people, don't you?

People skills, teamwork skills, being reliable.

Just being able to communicate with people, and have a conversation with someone, and be able to ...just basic little things, just be able to do them well.

Don't get too angry with your boss when he tells you what to do, because that doesn't go down too well.

You've got to have the communication skills, be able to work in a team, and work under orders and stuff.

Being able to talk to people that you are serving. When you're told to do something, doing it the way you're told to do it not your own personal touch on it unless you need to. And just having an open mind on people as individuals as well. Even if you don't particularly like someone, you still have to talk to them with respect and be caring and be understanding.

You have to accept that nobody's ... sometimes you are going to get told 'no' and things aren't going to always go your way.

Adaptable, being able to work in a team environment if it's needed. What's the word for a team-player? Um, flexible.

Around a third of the people who talked about pathways into employment mentioned 'people skills' or communication as being an essential skill-set necessary for gaining and keeping a job. This led us to recommend that Work and Income consider communication training as a primary element of the job-seeking process.

Punctuality, Presentation, And Attitude Affect Employment Opportunities



As far as getting a job I think attitude's about the best one. How you come across, and whether you're always there. As long as you turn up, the boss will be happy. Get your work done. Be punctual and, yeah, sort of, dedicated, I suppose.

Well you've got to turn up. You've got to be able to talk to them, and just work hard. Don't be lazy. Wear your correct uniform, have your hair how you're supposed to have it, don't wear too much make up.

By the time you walk through that door for the interview, they need to know that, as an employee, they're going to be safe, but also their children and their school are going to be safe. And they can say, "He presents himself well".

Punctuality. Experience - with the job. I wouldn't say 'qualifications' because some jobs you don't need qualifications - they train you on the job. So I would say 'reliability'.

Good motivation. Some people rely on others to motivate them. Problem is, in today's society you need to motivate yourself.

Well, to get a job you actually need a chance. Like, oh, they look at you and they go, "Oh nah. We can't employ him, he's scruffy".

Go in there with an open mind. Just because you're asking for the job, doesn't mean that it's yours. Be respectful, I suppose. Be interested. I mean if you're not interested you can't really work, can you?

Be responsible, honest, treat people the way you want to be treated, look after them. Punctuality, honesty, trust. You need to trust people that you work with. Honour their respect.

Willing to learn, showing up every day. Listen, carry out instructions, and clean up properly - all stuff like that. If you're willing to learn, you know, I'm pretty sure they're willing to employ you.

Once you get the job, keep showing up there five, ten minutes early. Stay there five, ten minutes later. Just little things like that. Just keep working, and if you haven't got any work to do, find someone and ask them, "What do I do now?" You know, just keep on looking for work while you're there, and people will say, "Okay, he's always willing to work, wants to do those couple of extra jobs after work". Little things, out of work hours. Just go for all those. Get a good name. Easy. Don't get lazy once you're employed.

Attitude. Punctuality. I think your age has a bearing. If you're older you're more mature. You can get yourself to work. You've got your lunch, you've got your safety gear. You've got all those things 'cause your age tells you that you should have it anyway. But if you're, seventeen or eighteen ...a lot of them wouldn't have breakfast. They jump into the vehicle and off, no lunch. Oh, I've forgotten my safety boots. You know, just things like that. So I think with my age, yeah, it's attitude and age helps.

Always tell the truth when you're going to a meeting or something. Don't try and say you haven't been in prison when you've been in prison twice, like I did, and they ended up finding out later on.

Many people mentioned attitude aspects as essential to getting and keeping a job. They said that jobseekers need to be enthusiastic, willing to work hard, and willing to keep learning. Sometimes these requirements overlapped with communication skills such as listening and being a team player. Yet while communication skills were usually seen as able to be learned, e.g., through training and punctuality, other life skills were often seen as inherent to personality. Desirably, people generally need to recognise life skills as capable of being taught and learned. This will help people who lack confidence in themselves to see life skills training as remedying something missing in their education, not a deficiency in themselves.

Confidence Creates Pathways To Employment



Oh, just being positive. Just, just going and knowing that you can do it, you can learn. Once you know that you can learn a job, you can go and do something totally, whatever you didn't ever think you could do.

Confidence is a big part of it, because if you apply for a job and whoever is at the interview can see that you're confident, then it gives you that leg up. It puts you ahead of other people who don't have it.

For looking for a job—self confidence, self respect, and be willing to take 'no' for an answer.

I think confidence, having confidence in yourself is the biggest part, I think, because people can see if you're confident. And if you're confident then, I suppose, in some ways that makes them feel better about you and they trust you more, or whatever, I don't know. Yeah, sense of humour and confidence.

How to really, how to go out there and say, "Hey, just wanting to get a job". And stuff like, you know, give them confidence in a way that they don't feel shy to not go out there and speak to employers and say, "I'd like to, I'm interested in doing this job". Just a real confidence builder, you know.

Confidence—go up and ask them for a job.

The main one I would say is to have the confidence, because it's amazing what you see people do just through bluffing their way through things. They've got the gumption to just go and do it anyway. And I've actually heard that from employers too. That's the sort of person that, you know, that could just, they'll give anything a go.

Confidence in what you're doing. I think that's important.

Just be comfortable about who you are, and what you see yourself doing in life. And how who you are revolves around how to do it, like goals and that sort of thing.

People need to be treated as whole beings, valued for their potential and supported in building self-belief, before they can make significant changes in their lives. Confidence kept cropping up again and again as a key issue—as a barrier, a pathway, and a need.

Work Experience Leads To Employment



Go on work experience where you do the job that you want to do, so you get familiar with all the stuff that they do there. I actually did more than observe. I was actually hands-on with the children. I went in and got stuck into it and met the teacher, spoke to the teacher aide, spent a lot of time with the children, and got a job offer. Especially through the practicum, teachers will say, 'Hey, I like what you do'.

By being out on practicums and being out there meeting people, meeting the right people, I had lots of job offers at the different centres. I had to turn people away.

I got one of my two part-time jobs through my work placement. I went one day a week for a term, and then at the end of the term, which was the last term of the course, they said that they had a job for me starting at the beginning of this year.

Work experience can be a valuable pathway into a job and often builds confidence at work. Employers should be open to offering a wider range of work experience opportunities. Learning institutions need to find ways to incorporate more work experience opportunities into a wider range of training.

Part Three: Needs

This third part of the report gives insight into what people said when they were asked what they feel is needed, either for themselves or for the next generation, in connection with literacy and employment. People were asked both what is needed in terms of learning, and what is needed for employment, but their answers overlapped or were intertwined so often that we have not separated this portion of the report into two halves as we did for parts one and two. Rather, this section gives a general overview of people's priority needs in general.

Often, the answers given here support the themes that arose when people were talking about barriers in their lives; obviously, barriers and needs are closely related. There are also, however, some new thoughts and suggestions arising here, which have given first-hand insight into some innovative and indirect ways to overcome the barriers identified in the first part of the report.

We Need Communication Skills



I need most communication in a total sense, spoken and written and so on.

You need to know how to deal with an interview, because that's part of your literacy.

To listen what's coming in and to be a good listener to what you want to learn. I say this because I missed out because I wasn't listening. I thought doing it my way would be easier, but I learnt, no, it wasn't. This is why I've come back to learn these things now, because I wasn't listening then.

The most important skills for children to learn are people skills, and communication skills. Growing up skills, like, to communicate with people. Be able to talk to people.

In the end I don't think literacy counts. I think that if you've got a reasonable knowledge of what you're doing and you're not making mistakes and you're reasonably polite and good in your job, you'll keep that job more than somebody that is excellent at what they're doing but doesn't know how to interact with people and what not. People get sick of people who aren't nice and, in the end, they go, eventually. They always get the toss eventually.

To talk to people and to get along with your workmates.

Learning how to socialise with other students. Communication so they can get along better with people when they go to school. Yeah, it's mostly communicating and working well with others.

Getting out there and actually meeting with the public and interacting with other children, those are those areas that need strengthening. Communication skills, yeah, to communicate with people.

Learning how to relate to different people. There wouldn't be much point in me working in a bookshop if I didn't like people.

Learn how to get on with people and the social skills and learn how to talk to people and to talk to your student if you've got a problem. To talk about it, don't just sit there and scream and fight, it doesn't get you anywhere. Communication is a very vital thing for anybody.

How to get on well in a team, playing team sports and be in groups and things. Sharing with others and working with others. And listening is a very important skill, listening to a person.

Children need to learn good social skills. You've got to be able to mix with all sorts of different people, and ultimately know how to treat people with respect and kindness. How to operate in a team environment.

They just need to learn how to talk to people. I mean, I know education is important, but you can have all the education in the world and if you don't have people skills, and you don't know how to care for your family and your kids and that ...

Just having communication or something, yeah, so they can speak out.

The majority of people to whom we spoke suggested that broad communication skills, rather than 'literacy' as such, were their most pressing need. They wanted, for themselves or for the next generation, more skills such as talking to others, 'people skills', 'social skills', listening skills, getting on with others in the workplace, working in groups or teams, negotiating, interpersonal skills, cross-cultural communication, assertive communication, and respecting difference. Given that this is such a large component of what is already on offer via adult training providers, training is on the right track to meet people's needs. However, it also seemed that people outside the training were unaware that this was what was on offer.

We Need Computer Skills



I need to learn how to use a computer, just learn the basics. That's the way of the business future. Going on the Internet, doing business on the Internet. So because I knew nothing about computers I thought well, that's what I need.

My main motivation was actually to learn how to use a computer, more than anything. It's not necessarily just for the office/administration side of things. It's because nowadays there's not a lot you can do without having some computer skills.

These days you have to be computer literate. In any workplace you need a computer to keep your data. If you can use it, you can do any job. Do any job instead of just being a someone who relies on other people.

I've been a storeman for so long now and I've got the floor-plan and I know how to get there, and all of a sudden the fellow says, "There's the computer over there". And I said, "Yeah, so what? I don't know". And he said, "Well, if you want to look for something, you can find it". You put it into the computer and it will show you where about it is in the warehouse instead of walking along trying to find A B C and D because the warehouse is 200m by 200m square.

Everybody needs computer skills these days, even tractor drivers. Everything these days is basically a world run on computers.

That was my own personal thing, anyway, the reason why I came here; to be literate with a computer. Computer skills have become more important, not only in the work world, in your private world.

Nearly everyone's got a computer these days, every business has got a computer there, so if you wanna go and work somewhere you're gonna have to become computer literate.

Looking through the papers now for employment, there's not much available where you don't need some sort of basic computer skills. At least to know how to work the programmes and how to work out stuff. And even when you think of check-out operators, there's the EFTPOS and there's this and that you have to know ...

I think they need computer skills because everything in the future will be computers. It doesn't matter if you're working in a supermarket or in a school, in an office, computers ...that's the first thing.

You've got to have the computer skills these days. If nothing else, then the benefit of being able to touch type.

With technology increasing exponentially at least every six months, I'd say for adults in this day and age to learn computing, that would be the best thing.

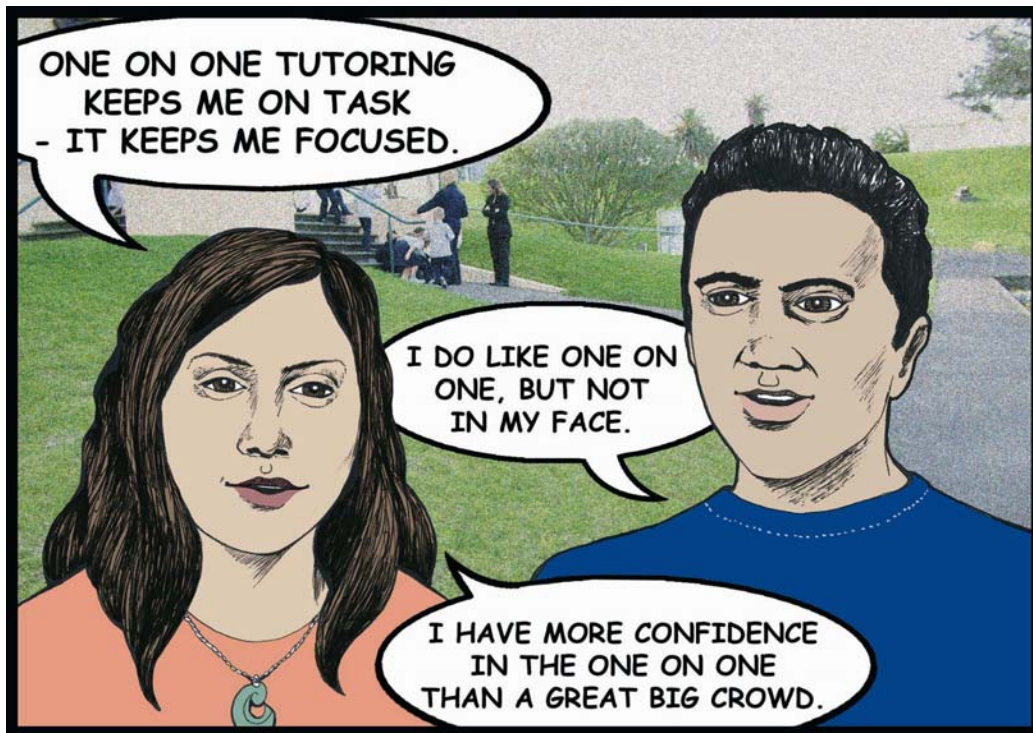
Most places need a filing system and I think it's important to know how to manage the files on the computer.

Definitely computer training. You need computers for everything, in everything, really.

As I'm finding out, computers skills are always a must. You have to have some sort of basic computer knowledge. You need it. Especially in dairy farming. A lot of dairy farming now-a-days is involved with computers.

Almost half the people we spoke with said computer skills were one of the most pressing learning needs for themselves or for the next generation. A few suggested that only clerical-type employment required computer skills, but others said "even (people such as) tractor drivers" now needed to be computer literate. Several people commented on the importance of learning typing. These comments make a valuable resource for marketing those existing literacy courses which do already embed reading, writing, and numeracy training as part of learning computer skills.

We Need One-to-One Instruction



In one-on-one I can absorb more. I listen to what they are really saying and relate to probably where they are coming from.

They said, "What do you want? Group or one-on-one?" And I went, "One-on-one, because I've got a lot of distractions, because I'm a clown amongst people. I just make a mockery of the whole thing". And got one-on-one and just ballsed it.

They've definitely got to have one-on-one. Don't do a group session. Because they asked me if I wanted a group session. I went, "No, because I'll just sit back in the corner, and everyone else would take the show and I'd learn nothing". One-on-one was huge. It was huge 'cause they could see where and what I hadn't learned.

I need that one-on-one help, like helping me put stuff on paper, or expressing myself, onto paper. My spelling's terrible. I can't make a sentence, you know. But just having that one-on-one, gives me the confidence that I need. I always avoided courses in the past, because I didn't like the big environment, the big class situation, and this was one of the things I liked about the courses here, that they are small groups and you get a lot of one-on-one attention.

I started as a group and found it hard. She's good, but when she had about six people or eight people and you're sitting there trying to get her attention, and she's busy ...

Not a big class, I get distracted on doing what I should be doing. It's much better for me if there's just only one or two of you there.

I feel better about one-on-one or small group. Because I always get stuck and they have to show me.

I like doing one-on-one. And you find it much easier because otherwise you've got too many distractions, people talking, you go over to the side and talk to people and all over the place because that's what I'm like.

I need the one-on-ones, the small groups, classroom activities, to build my confidence. Just little things that helped me. Just the helping and the one-on-one stuff.

In the group that I'm in at the moment, the other kids aren't interested in learning at all, and I'm the only one – so I'm finding it really hard. They're sitting there laughing and being stupid and I can't concentrate and do it properly – so probably one-on-one would be best.

Definitely not in a big group, one-on-one and in a very small group. I can ask so many questions that a teacher's gonna, or one person's gonna, answer. Back in a small group I ask a question and it's like out of five that the teacher would hear or pay attention to me, but in a big group there is no attention, and I get missed out.

There's not enough tutors to go around, on one-on-one. And sometimes a person needs that one-on-one help, or I do.

One-to-one coaching was a particular need for more than a third of the people we spoke with. Many felt uncomfortable in a group, or found it difficult to learn if others were talking. Often a combination of one-to-one and small groups was helpful, but one-to-one was most preferred. Many people who felt they had learned little or nothing in the school environment felt enormously capable and made rapid progress in the one-to-one environment. More opportunities for one-to-one learning need to be made available in traditional schools. Adult learning providers need funding to a level that permits enough tutors for one-to-one to all students who need it.

We Need Reading And/Or Writing Skills



Well, I decided to do it 'cause I needed to get my reading and writing skills back up.

Writing. When you take an order, you need to write it down.

Only reason I went on it is to help with my reading and writing.

I need to read and write because I need to read and spell for the kids, because they all will be asked how to spell.

Reading and writing and maths and all that. You need to know how to do all that. I'm trying to learn how to hand-write properly and form letters.

You have to learn how to read and write really well. I mean they are two essential things.

What I think is important for kids to learn now, is they have to be able to read and write. They come here and sit their driver's licence but the first thing they've got to do is get them on a course, because some of them don't understand what the questions are.

If you can't read you can't really do much. If you want to be a cook you need to know how to read and write, and add up. It's just common logic.

The important skills for adults in today's world to get a job are reading and writing. You'll be in a place that gets faxes all the time. So you've always got to read the fax. Words are all around us.

You need reading for warning signs and instructions, and writing to fill out a first aid form or write down a material list or write a report.

I need to learn to be able to read. I need to learn to be able to write and I need to be able to understand what is put in front of me. Basic day-to-day life kind of stuff. That's what helps you. I'd want my nephews or my kids to develop that skill in reading and writing.

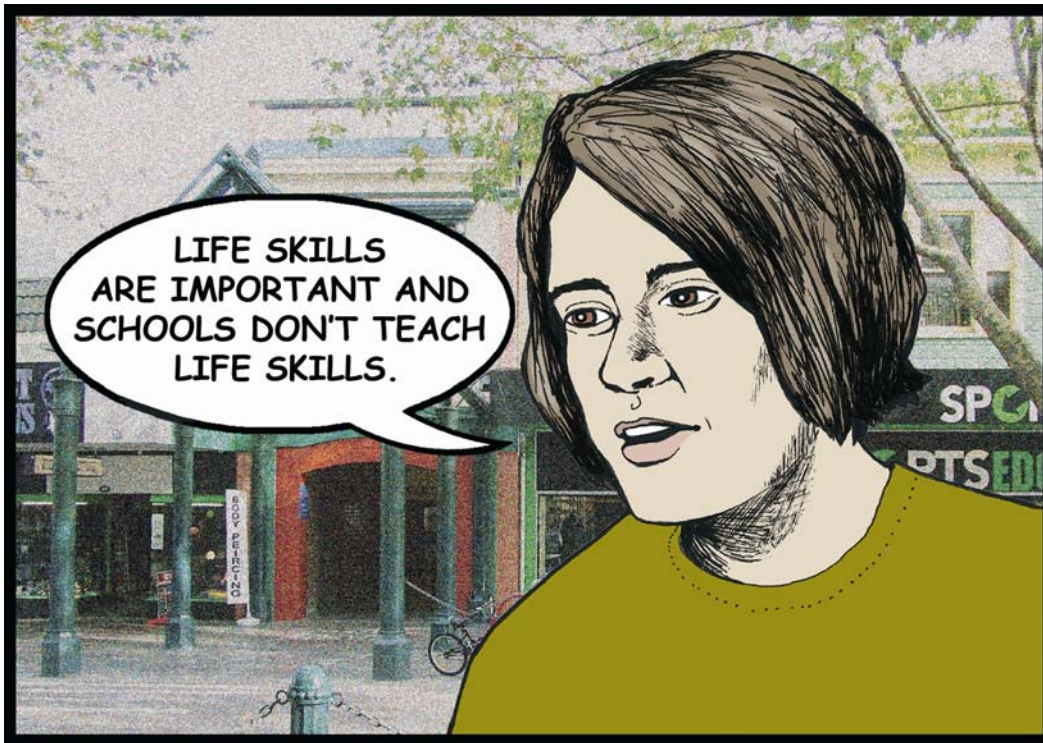
I was a linesman. When I first started working, we didn't do anything. We'd go off and fix pylons, fix it or paint it or whatever. Then, a year into it, we had to write stuff down in our log books. Not just for personal stuff but to be sent to the main office. That was a bit of a shock, yeah, just like that.

It wouldn't matter what job it is you'd still need reading and writing at some time. If somebody else reads what you're reading or what you've written and it's wrong, there's going to be a lot of confusion and conflicts going on.

Around one third of respondents saw reading and/or writing (including spelling) as key literacy needs. Some commented on safety aspects, others on reading as unlocking other knowledge. Some people mentioned only reading and writing, while others mentioned the traditional three of reading, writing, and numeracy. (We counted all references to maths separately; it was mentioned often, but not as often as reading and writing. It was interesting that there was quite a split with a mention of *either* reading and writing *or* maths more common than mentions of all three.)

We were anticipating that reading and writing would be mentioned by some people as literacy and employment needs, and they were. What we learned, was that they were mentioned far less often in comparison with other things such as broader communication and interpersonal skills, or computer skills. Computer skills were mentioned close to twice as much, and life skills (below) were mentioned just as often as reading and writing. This was one of the key discoveries from these interviews: people are not seeking reading and writing as much as they are seeking broader survival skills, more complex and subtle communication skills, or specific skills such as computing.

We Need Life Skills



I don't see any relevance out of school for life now because what I know now is learnt from life skills, learnt from life itself. I couldn't attribute anything that I learnt at school to what I know now.

Well, life isn't subjects, is it? No matter what you say, it's not subjects. Unless they know how to do some of this other stuff, all the subjects in the world aren't going to help them. It's life skills that really are important for children to be learning.

Time management – it's a must. Pride in yourself ...They should learn about what it takes to actually survive in the real world.

Boys need to learn cooking and all that sort of stuff because when you finish ...when you leave home and you go out in a flat, half the guys don't know how to cook.

The rights and the wrong things, and learning some skills the kids will need for when they go out to work ...Be able to be unsupervised around people and the bosses. Common sense, and general life skills.

More about money. I thought life was easy until I got a full-time job. It was pretty hard. Having to pay your way on everything. They need to learn budgeting.

Learning how to problem solve. Learning how to handle money, how to handle peer pressure. Just basic life skills. Employment skills. I reckon that kids need to really learn the basics. They need to learn about life and what happens in life.

Basic human skills – they're very important. Learning how to deal with yourself and recognising behaviours and stuff. If they'd had all those kind of life things that you learn out here, at school, I think you'd probably excel.

It's important for children to learn safety. Their wellbeing. Health, how to be healthy and stay healthy and being more healthy. And if they get injured they know what it is. And if they get abused they know that they are being abused in any way.

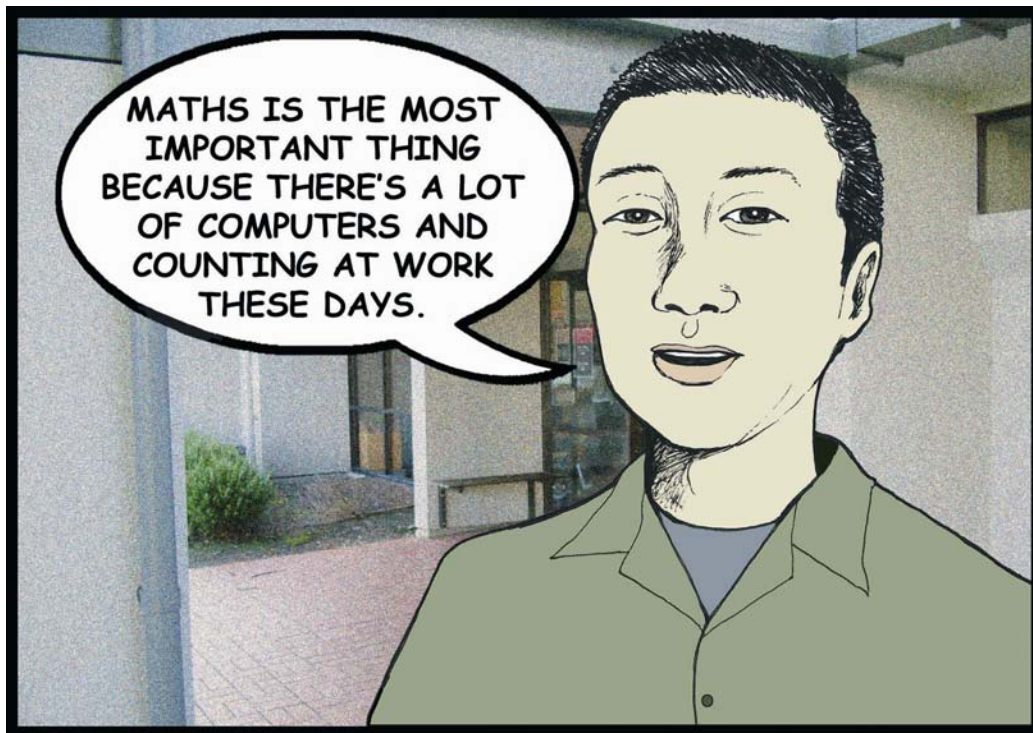
What did I get out of school? Nothing really. I didn't learn any life skills or anything, how to work, things like don't start smoking. Now I smoke and I wish I hadn't started. I really think those life skills are important. You have to have common sense to get through.

Life skills should be taught in school in mainstream, some basic stuff. I've got my memories of sitting in a history class. I think I only attended one period in the whole year and the teacher told me, "Don't bother coming back. Go and sit somewhere else". Because it was just a total waste of time for me. It was just because I had to fill the curriculum somehow. If you can get something like this here, learning life skills, that would have been heaps better.

More than one-third of the people we spoke with wanted life skills for themselves or the next generation. Distinct from specific communication skills, they sought financial literacy, health literacy, time management, practical day-to-day problem solving skills, 'common sense', or the ability to make good choices. They felt schools should place more emphasis on these than on more traditional subjects such as history.

People told us you could not survive without life skills, but you could survive without 'literacy'. Some people told us about their highly developed coping strategies for evading reading or writing in the workplace; "All the years they worked with me, none of them knew I didn't know how to read and write". As one interviewee confirmed, "People get away with not having any literacy skills, don't they somehow? Get through the system". Life skills, however, were something that people told us you could not compensate for. In a sense they were seen as more vital, more crucial, than reading, writing, or 'literacy'. Life skills and traditional '3R' literacy skills were seldom seen as inter-connected. Therefore, in addition to increased emphasis on life skills learning in schools, traditional literacy skills and life skills should be more clearly linked, and more often taught in an integrated way, in school and adult learning situations.

We Need Number Skills



I want my maths to be more advanced. I want to be good at decimals ...Be better ...be good at division.

I want to polish up maths. I've always sort of skirted around maths - never been my favourite kind of thing.

Even if you were a truck driver or something and you misread. "Oh you are meant to have this many pallets on a truck and you have only got four pallets instead of having six pallets". So now you're wondering where's two pallets gone. At the other end they are going "Where's the two pallets gone?"

I, myself, need my numeracy skills worked on.

If you can't add and subtract and multiply numbers, and you don't have a calculator, what else are you gonna do? Maths is all around us. It wouldn't matter what job it is you'd still need it at some time.

It's always got to be a part of what you do because you know you've got to have maths to sort out what goes where and what chemicals you need. Later on in life, even with the course that

I'm doing, maths is still the thing, because you've got to work out ...say the baby has six teaspoons for one litre of milk and you're making seven litres, you've still got to do maths.

When you're working on a dairy farm, you're having to record numbers and things.

Maths is quite important because you may have to write up a report or you might have to figure out where some money is going or whatever in a place and where you're working. I think it's very important that you know the basics at least.

Maths is a big one; how to count and do things with numbers. Every time you go on a course there's maths involved or in a job there's maths.

Numeracy is always good especially with aviation refuelling, 'cause you're working out fuel capacity and all that all the time.

Around one third of the people we spoke with volunteered maths, numeracy, or number skills as important either for childrens' learning or for adult employability. Many saw maths as a universal employment need while others saw it as specific to particular jobs.

We Need Knowledge About Cultural Literacy Or Whakapapa



I don't really know much about my background, my ancestors. I know who, like, my, the ancestor is. It's about it really. I wasn't one to sit down with all the aunts and uncles and learn about it – just wasn't me. Wish I had of now, but no, I didn't.

I want to learn about the Treaty of Waitangi, and about our culture, and where we're heading for, New Zealand and possibly even the world, you know.

I want to know who, whose blood line I come from and all that kind of stuff. You know, that's pretty important.

People I work with – we have a strong Māori workplace of friends I've got at work – I'd just like to know a little bit more about their culture and what they went through and what possibly we did to them.

I moved here because I have family down here and I get to research them. I get to find them.

To know where you come from; to know where your roots are; to be able to go back to the marae, so to speak, and to say I come from here, my ancestors come from here, I'm a direct descendent from whoever, and I'm proud to say I come from this land, you know? I've semi grown apart from that side of my existence.

I just came back three or four weeks ago from my grandmother's funeral so I had to reach back into the roots and get back with the whanau on that. It's good, though, to catch up with family and things.

Hopefully when we're learning Te Reo as part of our course it will help me find out my ancestral roots.

There's a connection, a bloodline, that runs back, and it's all connected at some part way back in the past. So we're all connected somehow. But for my bloodline through my family it's a more of a deeper spiritual connection to know where I come from.

Because Mum threw me into working she didn't really teach me ancestor wise and then I got adopted and they didn't teach me anything so I can't teach it to my kids now because I don't know it. I regret that I don't know much about my ancestry.

My mum's side, they were never really taught about their culture or Māori things ... so she doesn't really know much about her culture or her history or anything. But I'd like to learn about that side as well.

Around a third of the people we spoke with expressed a need to find out more about cultural background—either their own, or society's more broadly. Although their reasons were personal, there was a common sense of cultural and ancestral literacies as contributing to a holistic sense of identity. People from a range of cultural backgrounds regretted not having knowledge of their ancestors and hoped they would have opportunities to learn in this area.

Curricular integration, both at school and in adult learning, might be one response to these needs. Many adult learners were inspired to become computer literate, for example, by a desire to establish family genealogy, while others were learning to read or write in English as a first step but ultimately were keen to learn Te Reo, study history, or learn about biculturalism. Cultural literacy, as a clear motivator for learning, needs to be emphasised when training is provided and promoted. Other skills such as computing, reading, writing, or mathematics, could be embedded in cultural training, permitting learners to work towards a goal that motivated and interested them.

We Need Qualifications



Because I'd already done teacher aiding, I thought I may as well come and get the certificate. I figured that it would be easier to get a teacher aide job if you had the certificate.

People come to me with their problems and I listen to them and, yeah, twenty-five years of unpaid work. I figure, well, if I can get the qualifications I need, maybe I can get paid for doing this.

I always wanted to be a builder/carpenter/wirer/plumber because I've done all those trades, but not as a qualified person. So I would love to have a trade behind me.

Hopefully I'll get my qualification out of it. The first thing is a qualification; getting credits and unit standards.

You've got to do this course first before you can get in there, 'cause these qualifications will make them say, "Yes", not "Oh, you need to have this certificate and this certificate". Whereas if you come here, you get those certificates. So when you go in for jobs they really can't ...You've got everything, yeah. They just need a position for you.

I've got my farming side of things and if I want to get into the more business side, I need a qualification to allow me to do that.

It helps you get your NCEA credits, easier than it would be at school. The course I need to go on, I need to have a maximum amount of credits and so when I'm here, I'll get those credits.

I do not want to work as a teacher aide in a school. It's going to give me the qualifications. That's all I want, are the qualifications. I'm going to get all the qualifications from here that you can possibly get.

I need a qualification for the meat works so I can get into a job.

I just want to get this and National Certificates and NCEA Level 1 and 2. Then I want to go to UCOL or something and get a bigger qualification. Set my goal to come to class, complete this course ...and get that, that little bit of paper at the end. Think I'll probably go to another course after this one, to get better qualifications.

I want to complete my certificates before going into the Air Force—it tidies it all up.

It felt like, get the certificate and it was closed off, or it would just complete my overall experience in what I was doing. I was already a teacher aide but I have no qualification, and I didn't really know what I was doing. I was really just assisting this child in the hope that I did the best thing I could for him at the time, but now I'm training for the paperwork, the certificate.

I'd like to have a few qualifications, something under your belt, because things are going to get tough for social welfare now. I can see it coming, and they're going to try and push people onto doing courses.

You do need an education; qualifications. Qualifications are the main thing that you need to get a job. Every job interview that you went to, if they sat down and gave you a small sheet and said, "If you can fill this out, you've got the job", you wouldn't need qualifications. But, you know, it doesn't work that way. You have to get qualifications to do specific jobs.

When talk turned to 'needs', qualifications were not such a strong theme as they were when people were discussing barriers to employment, but they were still a clear theme. About a quarter of people commented on their need for formal qualifications for employment or were studying for the purpose of gaining qualifications or academic credits as an end in themselves.

We Need A Particular Knowledge Set Or Skills For The Job We Want To Do



I want to learn about farming; stuff like how to put up a fence, how to fix a water leak, how to fix the tractor if it breaks down.

Probably my first skill I need would be to get my licence, resit my licence. That would be the biggest skill, for me at the moment.

I've been in the meat works and butchery the last 10 years, and I decided to go into carpentry, for a change, so now I need those skills.

All jobs need skills, different skills. You can't expect a shopkeeper to be in a classroom like a teacher, so it all depends on the individual skills on your job situation. And these people here are good at teaching in this situation.

It deals with what I wanted to do, when I was 18, which was farming.

Depending on what job you have. If you're a secretary you need to know quite a bit about a computer, spelling, English, and maths. In accounting you need to know how to use computers, Excel, graphs, publisher, all those sorts of things.

If your job is to be a secretary or to be an editor then you need English and literacy skills, you need to know how to read, write, spell.

The important things that kids should be learning at school? Farming. For me, farming.

We worked it out in school that, for early childhood, I'd need food nutrition for the little kids.

For child care I need a first aid certificate, science certificate, maths, understanding of child care.

Well, it depends on what your job is. If your job is to be an accountant then you need maths.

Just under a quarter of the people we spoke with nominated job-related skills for a given career path as one of their most pressing needs, or suggested that people mainly need the skills of a particular job. Helping people to identify not only their career path but also what skills would help them succeed on that path was an important part of learning motivation.

We Need To Learn In Small Groups



My favourite way of learning would be working in a group situation, working with people rather than by yourself. Then you can plan out what to do, and you can plan ahead at times and it's an easy way for me to learn, and to get a future idea of what I want to do when I go for a job.

I like being in a group 'cause you're bouncing ideas off each other, and it really helps as well. And if you're not doing something right, they help you do it, as well.

I need a small group. I'm not one to talk in big groups.

I prefer a small group. One-on-one, it always feel really personal. You know, to me, whenever I do something one-on-one or am taught how to do it, it always feels, if you fuck up then that person is on your arse all the time. If you're in a small group it's got that friendly kind of atmosphere to it.

It was pretty fun in a group. Helps me learn a bit faster in a group – one-on-one you just study hard and that.

In a small group you get more attention from the teacher. One-on-one's good, but with a small group you can have little group discussions.

I need to be in a small group. Not one-on-one, but in a small group it's okay. Less than 20 people is a good way for me to learn. There's not so many people talking when they're not supposed to. It's easy to get to know other people that you're working with, and the teachers might have a bit more time to answer your questions.

I learn best in a smaller group, definitely, because it's only me and maybe someone else or a couple of other people and there's less people asking questions.

I quite like learning here with the 13. It just seems to be quicker to learn. We do some one-on-one work here, and I like that too. I'm very anti big groups, very anti, because the teacher just doesn't have the time to go through everybody.

Groups are a little bit more anonymous maybe. Small groups, not large groups. I like the one-to-one, but I also like the group because you get in there and we're learning, but it's not boring. I think we need to be able to learn, but make it an exciting learning situation.

Doing it in a group, you can all work together as a team, helping each other, and if they have a problem, I know I can answer it. If I have a problem, they can answer, you know. So we're working as a team. I actually needed that group to give me input so that I could get started, you know. Once I was started I was fine.

I liked the group work, but I also got a lot out of the one-to-one as well. It was like the one-to-one was mainly things that I was not quite picking up that I needed to go over again. Mostly the group work was my style, but one-to-one was very valuable as well.

Just under a quarter of the people we spoke with said that small group learning situations were the most important training need for them. Many emphasised that, while they enjoyed and felt competent learning with other people, the group still needed to be small, so that they were getting at least some individual attention. Some preferred the small group to one-to-one because it was less intense. Again, many people found a combination of one-to-one and small groups was helpful to them, but were coded here if they indicated that small group learning was their preferred style. Many who felt they had learned little at school felt capable and made rapid progress in a small group. More opportunities for supervised small group learning need to be made available in traditional schools. Adult learning providers should receive funding that permits tutors to provide small group learning to all students who need it.

We Need Confidence, Self-Belief, Goal Orientation, Or Motivation As A Platform For Learning



I think the biggest part of all is just having the confidence, having confidence, and self belief. A bit of discipline with those because sometimes we do have to discipline ourselves as adults. Emotions are more important to me than learning literacy straight away.

You need some direction, of what you want to be doing. And you need to be taking some initiative into doing it, heading in that direction with whatever training you can get. I think knowing what you want's a big, big thing; knowing what you want to be doing.

I think personal skills, like your personal development, you yourself you have to be sure of yourself. You have to know what you want, to be able to get it. So I think definitely personal development is important, and knowing where you want to go.

I just want to ...I want to get up to a standard where I can be respected because I am pretty much an alright person, it's just getting stuck in a hole and people don't really seem to worry until you're successful. I reckon that's stupid. You don't have to be successful for everyone to like you, eh?

You want them to be educated. You want them to have goals. You want them to have self belief, confidence and ...I think that may have been a big part of my education where I ...you

fall away. To know where they're going before they leave school and learning, yeah to start working on that at school ...

A bit of humour. Confidence. You have to be confident as well. I think that I've just got to be a bit more confident and get a bit more concentration and I'll be alright.

They need to feel good first before they could go out in society and take on whatever that's gonna come towards them.

I just want my kids to get the opportunity to learn and to be themselves without having to try and live up to false expectations like I had thrown in my face. My two sons, one is an academic and he excels at it. The other is a more practical kid who struggles with the academic side of things, although he can do it. And I don't want them to be pushed one way or another. I just want them to be able to try their best and if it is their best to get acknowledgement. Children need nurturing. It's like a plant. Without water, it dies.

Self respect in yourself, because if you can't respect yourself how are you going to respect other people and what they're teaching you.

Once you've got your discipline and then they know right from wrong, how to respect someone, how to listen. And then once that starts, bring literacy in combine it.

Just need the motivation to get up in the morning, to get there, to work hard and then to go home at night, have a rest, and get ready for the next day. Just to stick at things. To be responsible.

And to have ...even just to get the confidence to be able to do it. I need more confidence.

Many people said attitudinal skills such as having confidence, having a goal and a sense of empowerment to reach that goal, or having a 'positive' attitude or a work ethic were the most important literacy and employment needs. Once again people have to be seen holistically, as having needs to feel supported and valued, and to learn emotional skills, before other learning or change can take place.

Concluding Summary

The people whose voices are recorded here provided many important, proactive, and constructive suggestions for change, which were incorporated into our policy reports. Changes were needed across five main areas: school, home/community, workplaces, training, and self. Below we summarise the main changes people identified in each area.

School: Comments about teaching, learning style, and school simply not meeting needs were overwhelmingly prevalent. They indicate a need for much better and wider-reaching systems to identify learners early whose needs, broadly defined, are not met by traditional schooling. We learned that a wider range of non-traditional learning and curricular options is required for school-age learners. The same learners for whom school was unhelpful described their sense of joy at discovering their abilities within other environments, e.g., small workshop-style, peer-supported training.

As a society, we can no longer expect that standard classroom teaching should be a 'one-size-fits-all' learning solution. There still seems to be a cultural expectation that a 'normal' school-aged child will be suited to the classroom and school. Instead, we should ask how learning options can be broadened to more accurately reflect the diversity of learners' needs. We need to remove the stigma that suggests that a student who cannot learn at school is a 'failure'. In reality, many people in a variety of walks of life are in the position of not learning well through current schooling methods. It is important to switch the perspective to one where school is assessed according to its ability to meet learners' needs.

Most concerns about school indicate that a single teacher trying to look after a large class cannot cater adequately to students' learning and social needs. A range of solutions is needed. More students need the option of switching to a peer-supported, small group style learning such as offered by training providers, without any stigma attaching to this.

Another solution that will have a wide and rapid impact is reduction in class sizes. Particularly as society becomes more culturally diverse and makes an effort to enact biculturalism, re-thinking is needed of what comprises viable teacher-student ratios. Perhaps the single best step NZ education could take to increase its educational outcomes against OECD standards (see Education Counts, 2007) would be to reduce maximum class sizes right across the board. This would better cater for the unique diversities and strengths of learners. In our view greater investment in the school system would be more than off-set by increases in the national skill and knowledge

base. Further, less intervention would subsequently be required across a spectrum of social issues.

We did not go into these interviews with specific questions or ideas about schooling. But, more than anything else, this is clearly the site of some problems. Therefore it is here that changes are needed to teaching, the curriculum, and to the school culture itself, where we were told that bullying and peer pressure cause major learning problems.

Specifically, the comments about peers at school showed that more support for pastoral care programmes is needed to help schools proactively build positive, inclusive, mutually-supportive school cultures in which peer achievement is valued, and bullying and negative peer pressure are less likely to arise. Victimised or pressured students need clearer avenues for obtaining support, but positive cultural change is more important, to stigmatise bullying and proactively reduce occurrences. One such initiative is the Hubbards' 'Kick Out Bullying' programme, but we suggest that more comprehensive and compulsory programmes are needed nationwide that do not rely upon private sponsorship and are integrated with the curriculum. Skills such as non-violent conflict resolution and positive assertive communication, which have been shown to enhance self-esteem and reduce aggression, should be standard school curricular inclusions.

We also recommend that first-hand testimony such as these voices, from people who have experienced peer pressure, be used as part of mentoring or development programmes within schools. Adult learners could be employed to visit schools and explain what they now know about the importance of education, as their voices are such a powerful and compelling resource.

Home and community: Family communication in particular is an issue integrally connected with literacy—as a barrier and as a benefit. Literacy training has many positive effects in communication skills, self-esteem, confidence, building social networks, and feeling empowered to reach life and career goals. Therefore involvement in adult learning should be considered as a component of a whole range of other social programmes, including justice, parenting, and health.

Further research needs to address ways in which systematic mentoring and goal orientation programmes may be integrated within current social and community systems. Needed is a society where no one individual is left feeling disempowered to reach their goals, or feels that setting goals is pointless. Especially needed in society is strength-based thinking that sees all people and groups of people in terms of their worth, not in respect of their limitations. (For example, see the strengths-based models of Buckingham, 2005; Buckingham & Clifton, 2001; or Duncan, Miller, &

Sparks, 2004.) We have attempted in this research programme to approach literacy from a strengths perspective, not a deficit model. Yet we see a need for similar viewpoint shifts in some others of the social and political systems we have encountered in the course of this research, which intersect with issues of literacy.

Workplaces: The voices speaking in this report indicate that workplaces need to find ways to offer more opportunities for work experience to non-employees, and find better ways of balancing current employees' work and study requirements. This might be through support for study such as flexible hours, study spaces, and resources in the workplace. We also suggest connecting qualifications more clearly with workplace skills in the minds of both adult learners and their employers. It is desirable for people to see a qualification as something that will add relevant workplace value and whole-of-life skills.

Implied here is an attitude shift. Instead of work and learning being seen as separate activities, employers would see their workplaces as learning environments. Here multiple literacies such as long-term knowledge of workplace practices would be valued and recognised as teachable. An example may be a work experience buddy system, where an inexperienced worker with good writing skills is paired with an experienced worker who has deep workplace knowledge but less developed writing skills. Each could be charged with developing the other's abilities during the joint production of a workplace report. The feedback from adult learners who have become formal or informal tutors for their peers suggests that everybody can teach at least one thing to others. The benefits for confidence and self-belief from doing so are enormous. The employer benefits from the capture of tacit knowledge that might otherwise be lost, while each employee benefits by learning from the other, and learning that they have something valuable to teach.

The significant levels of workplace discrimination mentioned by people we interviewed also need to be addressed. In Scotland and in some Australian states, social marketing programmes called 'Experience Counts' are redressing some of the negative stereotypes faced by older workers (See Scottish Executive, 2006, for the Scottish blueprint; see Active Seniors, 2006 for the Victorian plan—television advertising is currently running for the same programme in Queensland). A similar programme, plus further emphasis on 'Diversity Adds Value', is needed here. A further problem is when individuals from 'notorious' families are discriminated against by association. The Human Rights & Equal Opportunity Commission may consider this as part of its programmes.

Training: The two key lessons from the overwhelmingly positive comments about adult literacy training, were 'more of the same' and 'more marketing'. A small number of comments indicated administrative issues that individuals were unhappy

with. Yet the overwhelming essence of the comments was that lives were changed for the better by interviewees' experiences of adult learning. The great majority of people in training were aware of others in their communities who would also benefit from training, and wanted to share that life-changing experience with them.

The best people to spread the message about these courses into the community are the participants themselves, whose lives have been changed by the learning process in many positive ways. The courses are clearly working well; almost nobody we spoke with had complaints or concerns with the courses. It is important to increase the numbers of courses available and better promote them to a wider audience. For the most part people felt their needs were well served by the courses on offer—once they found out what was on offer, which was often not what they expected.

Our recommendations included a direct-recruitment marketing programme where current and former adult learners were employed as marketing agents. Such individuals are well equipped to take the message into their own communities and peer groups. We also sought better branding of the available training based on the benefits that participants identify, along with increased funding for literacy providers to ensure that demand can be met with sustained quality of supply. Most people felt strongly that they had blossomed in adult training specifically because of well supported one-to-one and small group learning environments. Therefore if demand is raised, funding should be too, to keep class sizes small and tutor support intensive.

Self: People need to feel good in themselves, to feel supported, encouraged, and valued, before they can take on extra challenges. They need to have sufficient income, time, transport, childcare, flexible working hours, health, and confidence that they can achieve, in order to achieve. Simply put, people are human beings, not numbers on a 'literacy' statistical graph. Literacy policies that overlook this fail the people they are supposed to serve.

We have reached the end of the report but not, we hope, the end of the voices. This conversation needs to continue. The concept of *korerorero* seems helpful here, understood as an ongoing talking, a continuing to-and-fro or back-and-forth collaboration or exchange, with a range of voices helping to best illuminate the issues and the opportunities for change. We hope that these voices initiate a to-and-fro conversation, and that they resonate with learners, teachers, communities, leaders, decision makers, and researchers, with the aim of encouraging shifts in thinking about 'literacy' in our society.

If you know of any other places or people connected with the areas mentioned in this report, who would like a copy of it, please send us their contact details or direct them to our website at <http://literacy.massey.ac.nz>.

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In this report we attempt to bring to the forefront the perspectives of persons whom we interviewed, participants in adult literacy training classes. It is always a risk with a report such as this, which comments on issues associated with low functional literacy in English, that policy or "expert" points of view may crowd out the lived

experience of people who possess low literacy in a society which privileges facility with the printed word. Here we have attempted to redress the balance a little, by depicting participants' words as spoken by "ordinary citizens in everyday Wanganui contexts."

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