



31 Mar 2022

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Article type: Publication

Page: 4

Border Mail, The

Readership: 47000

AVE: \$1567.37

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page 1 of 1

# New life ahead with better literacy skills

BY CAROLINE TUNG

WHEN Georgie Potter left school before completing year 10, she immediately knew she needed to study "some kind of course".

"When I left school, I had little to nothing," she said.

After studying a Certificate II Career Preparation through the Work Opportunities for Women Program, the TAFE NSW Albury student is now a care companion at Mercy Place Albury.

A federal government inquiry has found many Australians are falling behind when it comes to having enough literacy skills to contribute to the workforce and other areas of civic life.

The inquiry findings, released last week, showed many people were leaving school with gaps in literacy and numeracy that limited their employment and life options.

The workplace skills Ms Potter gained during her TAFE course included writing resumes, cover letters, resignation letters, filing incident reports, writing emails, as well as numeracy skills and computer skills.

Completing a Certificate II helped grow her confidence



**BRIDGE THE GAP:** The Adult Literacy Inquiry found 40 per cent of adults have low level literacy skills. National manager of Reading Writing Hotline, Vanessa Iles, meets aged care student Georgie Potter. **Picture: JAMES WILTSHIRE**

in job interviews, and she also went on to complete a Certificate III Individual Support, also at the Albury TAFE campus.

Reading Writing Hotline national manager Vanessa Iles said pathway courses - non-accredited courses that don't have a certificate, but equip people with everyday skills - were identified as important in the federal government's Adult Literacy Inquiry.

"There's been a lot of interest at the moment with the Commonwealth government in adult literacy," she said.

Thirty per cent of adults are at level two literacy level, according to inquiry findings.

Level two literacy and numeracy, as defined by the Australian Core Skills Framework, is considered as the level required to meet the basic demands of work and life.

Another report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development that surveyed adult skills showed 40 per cent of Australia's adult population had low literacy levels.

Ms Iles said reasons people called the hotline included needing help for filling in forms, finding a class, homeschooling their children, or to get back into the workforce.

She said the Reading Writ-

ing Hotline was keen to see the Department of Education's recommendations.

"The Reading Writing Hotline received a 30 per cent increase in calls, because people didn't have the sort of support network that was available," she said.

"It's really highlighted that it's quite hidden in the community.

"People are very nervous and embarrassed ... to say that literacy is an issue."