



**Victorian
Skills Authority**



International
Specialised
Skills
Institute



est. 1991

Trauma support in adult classrooms – A study into creating a resource portal for VET practitioners | Bettina Twyman, 2023



© **Bettina Twyman 2023**

First Published 2023

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, in any form by any means, without permission from the publisher

Report by Bettina Twyman

Typeset by Danielle Cull

Printed by MDM Copy Centre

The International Specialised Skills Institute

1/189 Faraday St,
Carlton VIC 3053

info@issinstitute.org.au
+61 03 9347 4583

ISBN: 978-1-923027-22-0

Table of Contents

1

1. Acknowledgments

3

2. Executive Summary of Fellowship

5

3. Fellowship Background

6

4. Fellowship Learnings and Findings

12

5. Considerations and Next Steps

14

6. Impacts of Fellowship

25

7. Sector Engagement (Dissemination)

26

8. Conclusion

28

9. References

THIS PAGE HAS BEEN INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

1. Acknowledgments

The Awarding Body – International Specialised Skills (ISS) Institute

The ISS Institute plays a pivotal role in creating value and opportunity, encouraging new thinking and early adoption of ideas and practice by investing in individuals.

The overarching aim of the ISS Institute is to support the development of a 'Better Skilled Australia'. The Institute does this via the provision of Fellowships that allow Australians to undertake international skills development and applied research that will positively impact Australian industry and the broader community.

The ISS Institute was founded 29 years ago by a small group of innovators, including Sir James Gobbo AC, CVO, QC, and former Governor of Victoria, who had a vision of building a community of industry specialists who would lead the up-skilling of the Australian workforce. The Fellowship program builds shared learning, leadership and innovation across the broad range of industry sectors worked with. Fellows are supported to disseminate learning and ideas, facilitate change and advocate for best practices by sharing their Fellowship learnings with peers, colleagues, government, industry and community. Since its establishment, ISS Institute has supported over 450 Fellows to undertake skill and knowledge enhancement across a wide range of sectors which has led to positive change, the adoption of best practice approaches and new ways of working in Australia.

The Fellowship programs are led by our partners and designed to achieve the needs and goals desired by the partners. ISS Institute works closely to develop a Fellowship program that meets key industry priorities, thus ensuring that the investment will have a lasting impact.

For further information on ISS Institute Fellows, refer to www.issinstitute.org.au

Governance and Management

Patron in Chief: Lady Primrose Potter AC

Patrons: Mr Tony Schiavello AO and
Mr James MacKenzie

Founder: Sir James Gobbo AC, CVO

Board Chair: Professor Amalia Di Iorio

Board Deputy Chair: Mark Kerr

Board Treasurer: Adrian Capogreco

Board Secretary: Alisia Romanin

Board Members: Jeremy Gobbo

Chief Executive Officer: Katrina Jojkity

Sponsor – the Victorian Skills Authority

The Victorian Skills Authority works in partnership with the International Specialised Skills Institute by funding the VET International Practitioner Fellowships. The Fellowship program focuses on developing opportunities within the VET sector to assist in building an Education State in Victoria that produces excellence and reduces the impact of disadvantage. In addition, the program is funded to support the priorities of Skills First, including developing capacity and capability, innovative training practices and increasing teacher quality within the VET sector as well as building industry capability and developing Victoria's current and future workforce.

The Fellow wishes to express appreciation of the valued support and guidance from:

- Farida Stanikzai - Operations Manager and the staff at New Citizens' Gateway. United Kingdom.
- Sanne and staff - West London Welcome. United Kingdom.
- Karen Flowers and staff - Homes for Ukraine. United Kingdom.
- Mind in Croydon staff – United Kingdom.
- Neighbourhood Houses Victoria. Australia.
- Adult Learning Australia
- People accessing the important trauma services visited in this Fellowship in the U.K. for sharing their experiences with the Fellow.
- Wendy Draayers - ISS Institute Australia.
- Lorraine Orkney Thomson – 2018 ISS Institute Fellow for faith and encouragement.
- Dr Katrina Jojkity - ISS Institute Australia for ongoing support and encouragement
- Yarraville Community Centre – A community centre that delivers inclusive and meaningful adult learning each day and where the Fellow's motivation to explore VET practitioner's resources started.
- Christine McCall, CEO – Yarraville Community Centre Australia. The Fellow's Mentor for always sharing time, experience, knowledge and guidance. For teaching the importance of holistic learning for classrooms.

The love and support of the Fellow's husband Jude and son Leo was an essential element and greatly appreciated.

2. Executive Summary of Fellowship

Trauma-informed teachers when equipped with the appropriate resources provide a psychologically, physically,

and identity-safe learning environment where all adult learners are equal in their classroom community.

Teachers who work together with case workers are trauma-informed and supported to get to know their adult learners and build relationships based on their knowledge of individuals and their needs.

From the Fellow's experience the Victorian Education Training sector needs to consider how trauma impacts learning and behaviour.

How trauma can slow down or completely stop our adult learner's ability to learn and how as a sector we are supporting teachers and case workers in this environment.

The Fellow's purpose has been to determine if teachers and caseworkers accessing resources and tools to support adult learners through a central portal curated by the Victorian Skills Authority will result in improved and completed pathways of education and training.

This Fellowship investigates what VET practitioners in adult learning settings have been seeking in support due to the impact that trauma has on their adult learners' ability to learn and pursue their goals.

The need for these teacher support resources is critical however the turn toward mental health and trauma-informed practices in adult classrooms is dependent on outcomes being successful and meaningful. Teachers and case workers are increasingly expressing that there is a gap in support and professional development from the Victorian Skills Authority in accessing initiatives and resources collated and vetted through a central portal.

Working with trauma-affected adult learners as teachers and case workers is to walk a fine line of compassion and boundaries with adult learners. Acknowledge the harmful impacts of the past, whilst hold out hope for future recovery. Various individual attempts are made by teachers and caseworkers to create a safe environment for adult learners to share their lives yet maintain professional boundaries.

Everyday teachers and case workers provide trauma support to adult learners in Victoria that has no central reference point. A focus must be on supporting the well-being of teachers and case workers in adult learning settings and their current under resourcing.

The Fellow's experience suggests adult learners with trauma are significantly disadvantaged in VET programs, resulting in disengagement. This Fellowship identifies the value of trauma informed best practice for VET practitioners in supporting students to achieve training & employment outcomes.

Fellowship research identifies:

4

- Resources and programs in the United Kingdom designed and implemented to reduce trauma's negative impact in training environments and why they should be widely disseminated.
- Practical strategies that address the significant adverse outcome of trauma in training and employment settings and the need to share these strategies.
- The support options students with trauma are seeking from training programs both in the UK and Australia.
- The strategies that have empowered a student with trauma to maintain engagement in training programs.
- Findings will provide evidence for a central portal of resources for VET practitioners to increase our outcomes for disadvantaged students.

Combining these findings is strong evidence for the need of an information portal delivered by the Victorian Skills Authority for VET practitioners to access and receive targeted supports for their adult learning environment that is trauma informed best practice.

Teachers and caseworkers in VET settings are responsible for ensuring they create a learning environment that acknowledges the impact of trauma on adult learning, as well as the risk of re-traumatisation, and it must be the Victorian Skills Authority response to ensure that learning and teaching, whether in class or online, or in the field, is trauma-informed by providing quality and up to date resources to all VET practitioners that sets a benchmark across our industry.

Literature from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare reports that 57-75% of Australians found that 57% of the Australian population is reported to have a lifetime prevalence of trauma. To reduce the impact of traumatisation and re-traumatisation teachers and case workers as VET practitioners need to understand risks for adult learners, be aware of the signs and symptoms of trauma, know how to respond, and consider the implications for learning.

The current gap for teachers and case workers is resources to understanding how to respond and how to respond in a wraparound support method for the adult learner using resources curated by the Victorian Skills Authority.

3. Fellowship Background

The Fellow delivered the Yarraville Community Centre's Reconnect program delivered mentoring to disadvantaged learners through a pathway of VET training and education with employment outcomes.

This program within (YCC) a community centre that also provides the Australian Migrant English Program (AMEP), Skills for Education and Employment (SEE), Skills First training, educational programs, services and community engagement programs. With over 180 clients in the Reconnect program both case workers (coaches) and teachers experienced the increasing impact of trauma in our cohort of students. The severe negative impact on their studies and training is significant. This disengagement impacts the student's ability to commence or complete their VET program and employment outcomes.

Literature by Heather Bobrow Finn states "The constant reinforcement of trust among both students and teachers is critical in creating an environment open to learning and lowering students' anxiety levels, particularly when working with individuals who have experienced trauma. Once students feel less vulnerable, teachers can focus on helping students to develop greater confidence in the classroom." (Overcoming Barriers: Adult Refugee Trauma Survivors in a Learning Community).

Across a range of community projects YCC engages with individuals and families through educational programs, services, and a food relief program who are seeking asylum and beginning their journey in recovering from trauma as they undertake education and training pathways.

The reasoning for the ideas proposed in this Fellowship is to share research and supports for my VET colleagues and highlight the need for trauma informed practice across all registered training authorities but to also promote increased collaboration between teachers and caseworkers in adult learning environments. Also, that community centres are leading the way in best practice with trauma support for adult learners in the U.K. through collaboration between services to share resources.

From discussions with practitioners and experts throughout Victoria the current practice for VET practitioners in supporting students with trauma is beholden to the policies and procedures of their individual organisations.

The ability to research and implement classroom strategies is dependent on organisations allocating time to VET practitioners to do this and the ability to direct staff to the appropriate resources.

The Victorian Skills Authority can improve the way it provides its overarching support and guidance to the sector by providing this portal that sets a standard in the mental health supports for students and greatly expands the capacity of VET practitioners.

4. Fellowship Learnings and Findings

The following organisations were selected to communicate with and visit due to their work on the frontline of supporting adult learners with trauma in the United Kingdom. The innovative work that these organisations delivered formed the basis of guides and resources the National Health Service U.K. and the Trauma Council UK used to educate teachers and caseworkers.

A diverse range of organisations were engaged to demonstrate how trauma presents and is supported by different case workers and teachers. To explore how a portal of resources by the Victorian Skills Authority would need to canvass experiences and proven methods from a range of RTO's, Community centres, Welfare services and adult learning providers in Victoria.

Date	Key contact, organisation & location	Outcome	Future relationship and sharing
Wednesday 12th Oct to Friday 14th	Farida Stanikzai - Operations Manager New Citizens' Gateway 8th Floor Hyde House, The Hyde NW9 6LH	After two days of shadowing case workers and teachers delivering English language programs and employment skills programs, Fellow was provided insight into the challenges case workers and teachers are experiencing in supporting clients/students with trauma and its ongoing input in re-settling into a new country.	Further collaboration through sharing of experience and how/if new initiatives devised by existing case workers and teachers are effective in 2023. Agreement to trial new resources developed from this Fellowship. Ongoing communication around emerging teaching and case work professional development and methods of support for both staff and clients/students.
Monday 17th Oct and Tuesday 18th October	Sanne - West London Welcome, Gliddon Road, London W14 9BL	Experiencing two days as a volunteer at this community centre that focuses on the support of asylum seekers and refugees who have experienced trauma led the Fellow to learnings around diverse methods to support diverse cultures and various cohorts. Understanding how case workers and teachers at the centre face various barriers to keeping clients/students with trauma engaged and what methods have been effective in retention and what has resulted in disengagement.	Ongoing communication and collaboration with wellbeing consultant, the cultural workers, and the legal aid officer to disseminate the barriers and the methods used to engage and support learners with trauma. Agreement to review Fellowship findings and trial possible new resources developed from findings.

Date	Key contact, organisation & location	Outcome	Future relationship and sharing
Wednesday 19th Oct and Thursday 20th October	Homes for Ukraine – Various foster homes.	Fellow shadowed key worker and founder for two days in visiting families who are currently hosting families and or individuals from the Ukraine. Learning the challenges faces by foster families supporting families with trauma from the Ukraine and how a grass roots organisation is developing their own resources of support for the foster families and for the families with trauma.	Agreement for further communication in 2023 as I use learnings and ideas from the organization to adapt to relevant resources for case workers and teachers in our VET sector. Organisation open to trialling new resource development from this Fellowship.

A key finding of this Fellowship was identifying the long-term impact of trauma on adult learners. To recognise that the adult learner is in a constant state of trauma response and low-level fear.

Farida Stanikzai, Operations Manager at New Citizens Gateway states “Refugees and asylum seekers are among the most vulnerable members of society and have complex needs. Every year thousands of people arrive in the UK to seek refuge. Escaping persecution, disruption, and wars, most of them have experienced torture, trauma, and loss.

Many have been subjected to violence and rape or have witnessed their family and friends being tortured or killed. The route they normally take to safety is risky, dangerous, and often very long. Leaving behind their home, belongings, and all that they were familiar with, they come to the UK facing many additional challenges, the main one being to build new lives for themselves in an unfamiliar and sometimes hostile environment, with poor linguistic skills and little or no knowledge of their rights and entitlements. Listening to the life stories of so many different people from diverse backgrounds has revealed the impact that a combination of pre- and post-migration experiences has had on the mental and physical wellbeing of adult learners”.

Ms Stanikzai concluded “We strongly believe that while it is important to understand and address the mental, physical and practical problems of refugees, it is also respectful to honour their capacity for resilience. Our years of experience of working with this group confirm that they have a remarkable degree of both resilience and resistance to any difficulties caused by their forced migration, and that, in a supportive and safe environment, they can adapt and rebuild their lives”.

The Fellow's learning from the organisational visits is that trauma triggers behaviours in many diverse ways in a classroom setting. The major challenge for teachers and case workers in supporting traumatised adult learners is to be able to provide structure, predictability, and sense of safety that can help them begin to feel safe enough to learn.

Teachers in adult learning settings both in the UK and Australia expressed that adult learners present as capable of learning and intelligent but then perform poorly in classroom settings. Previous learning has been frustrating and sometimes humiliating for these adults. Adult learners come into the adult learning classroom with experiences of failure, and often with an expectation of further failure.

This understanding by case workers and teachers is essential in understanding why an adult learner with a history of trauma cannot learn effectively without appropriate support.

Sanne van den Bergh - Casework and Development Coordinator at West London Welcome works with the organizations advice team to coordinate casework, supports the directors to develop the centre and translates in Spanish, Indonesian and Arabic. She was a key volunteer member of West London Welcome's predecessor group, Hammersmith, and Fulham Refugees Welcome, supporting Sudanese and Syrian families to resettle in the neighbourhood.

Sanne initiated a process for English classes at the centre that involved in re-figuring classrooms from individual rooms to an open setting in a large space that has individual tables assigned to levels. This is to create a more inclusive learning environment with the purpose being to break down past trauma triggers. The success of this idea remains at the centre or when the centre chooses to collaborate with other centres there is no current opportunity for organisations in the UK or Australia to share initiatives that have delivered success and are approved by the Victorian Skills Authority.

Date	Key contact, organisation & location	Outcome	Future relationship and sharing
Friday 21st October	Fariba Nassiri - The Yaran Club, a service for Farsi speaking women (Iranian, Afghan, Tajik) in Finchley.	Fellow attended the club meeting and training day. Fellow experienced the therapy group for Persian women escaping Iran and Iraq. This included talk therapy, art therapy and career counselling. A shared cooking and lunch experience and in the afternoon, Fellow was able to interview 3 women on their experience of trauma while completing new study and training and commencing new employment. Fellow was also able to interview the founder of this support service and learn of the specific needs of CALD women with trauma entering new training pathways.	Continued engagement through communication on the findings from my visit and how to relate the women's experiences into development of resources for trauma in our VET sector. Continued interviews with the 3 women through their study and training journey and how they are supported with their trauma.
Monday 24th October and Tuesday 25th October –	Croydon College – College Road Croydon CR9 1DX The Safeguarding & Wellbeing Team	Whilst under strict confidentiality agreement Fellow was able with consent to observe appropriate appointments and training sessions for students with trauma. These sessions are designed to prepare students with trauma for classroom environments and continue to support them with coping strategies throughout their course.	Continued support and consultation. Adapting the strategies that are currently working in their sessions into resources that would benefit the VET sector.
Wednesday 26th October and Thursday 27th October	Mind in Croydon – Michael 26 Pampisford Road, Purely, Surrey CR8 2NE	Fellow interviewed with key support staff who support and integrate clients with trauma into various training and study pathways. Learnings around the importance of addressing barriers before students begin in the classroom and the how case collaboration between case workers and teachers can give holistic and continued support to students with trauma.	Agreement for further consultation with staff and staff to review the development and ideas around possible resources for the VET sector.

Exposure to traumatic events can have significant long-term consequences for students. Reactions to traumatic events vary, but they usually include anxiety and nervousness as well as sadness or depression. This presents negative behaviour in learning environments, interactions with peers, and at home. Some of these consequences directly interfere with performance and completion of VET programs by students disadvantaged with trauma. The Fellow's VET professional experience has shown that exposure to trauma leads to:

- Decreased IQ and reading ability
- Higher absenteeism
- Decreased rates of employment outcomes
- Significant deficits in attention, abstract reasoning, and long-term memory for verbal information.

Literature proposes that discussions of traumatic exposure and their impacts on the classroom have become increasingly common in education circles in recent years, befitting its serious impact on subsequent quality of life and its prevalence in society. Literature states in the United States, up to 90% of adults report having experienced at least one potentially traumatic event (PTE) in their lifetime (Kessler, Sonnega, Bromet, Hughes, & Nelson, 1995; Kilpatrick et al, 2013). Furthermore, most people who experience one PTE tend to experience additional PTEs (Kessler et al, 1995; Kilpatrick et al, 2013).

An international study representing individuals from 24 countries found that over 70% of respondents experienced at least one PTE, and 30.5% had experienced four or more (Benjet et al, 2015). PTEs include childhood neglect; sexual, physical or emotional abuse; natural disasters; interpersonal violence; and generational or historical traumas.

Fariba Nassiri - The Yaran Club stated "I founded this Women's group out of the need for Persian women who have experienced significant trauma due to war and immigration seeking a safe space. With learning English and then learning training for employment our women need teachers who are enthusiastic about their profession and who can make their lessons interesting and fun; a teacher who is willing to help them to learn by showing a positive attitude, being patient, and giving them guidance. These qualities are not just nice details, they may be what prevents a woman from dis-engaging when triggered and recovering".

The Fellowship findings provide strategies for inclusion and support for students with trauma. The findings will assist policies, procedures, strategy plans and toolkits to equip VET practitioners to relieve trauma conditions students may be experiencing such as depression, and other trauma symptoms in students who have had exposure to trauma.



5. Considerations and Next Steps

A significant challenge to approaching and completing this Fellowship was the two-year COVID 19 pandemic. Not only with the restriction of overseas travel but due to lockdowns in both the UK and Australia visits to organisations to connect and observe best trauma informed practice was not possible.

12 Next step is direct engagement with the Victorian Skills Authority department around possible design and implementation of the portal.

This research should advocate the need for the portal and how to collaborate with case workers and teachers from community organisations already delivering initiative and /or developing resources that are providing meaningful outcomes.

Potential limitations are funding and the approaches needed to engage all VET providers in designing and implanting a portal.

This Fellowship investigates methods to improve the support of VET practitioners in adult learning environments with students who have experienced trauma. This Fellowship explores the need for a portal of resources to support VET practitioners provided by the Victorian Skills Authority. This portal would be designed for VET practitioners both in classroom and case work environments providing practical strategies, resources and supports to build the capacity and competency of VET practitioners in delivering meaningful outcomes for adult learners This Fellowship aims to share the innovative approaches from the United Kingdom that have improved adult learning and training.

An information portal would:

- Combat adult learner disengagement through the upskilling of VET practitioners in their supports of learners with trauma
- Provide up to date resources approved by the Victorian Skills Authority that would be used across the VET sector ensuring consistency of support to adult learners.
- Establish a holistic and wrap around approach to delivering adult learning that provides not only to the vocational need of adult learners but to the emotional and mental health needs in a learner's pathway to an educational outcome.
- Promote case collaboration between VET practitioners.

In the piece "Trauma Impacts Adult Learners: Here's Why," Karen Gross (2019) states that we live in a world filled with trauma, and that its symptoms are often invisible or misunderstood. While trauma and its impacts are omnipresent, the recent pandemic is revealing the depths of

inequality in our systems as well as the consistent trauma associated with these inequities. Losing pay checks, constant exposure to stress, unrelenting racial violence, threat of eviction, deaths in families and communities, in addition to the consequences of persistent and continuous social inequities, are all potential triggers for heightened traumatic responses.

Evolving into the best trauma-informed practice is dependent on sharing practices, not just developing initiatives within silos of different organisations and training providers.

13

Multiple opportunities to gain experience and collaborate under the umbrella of a Victorian Skills Authority portal is vital.

6. Impacts of Fellowship

Personally, and Professionally – The lockdowns and emotional impact of the Covid 19 pandemic of 2020 and 2021 brought feelings of isolation and hopelessness. The knowledge that, when possible, the Fellow could travel and fully explore the research was positive and much needed light to focus on.

The Fellow was supported by a husband and 9-year-old son who provided encouragement, IT assistance and de-briefing services.

The Fellow's self-confidence, interview skills and independent research skills developed into a professional level that will further build a career in the VET sector.

Connections made in the research with colleagues in the UK and Australia has provided expanded networking that will serve the Fellow's future VET endeavours.

Mentoring by Yarraville Community Centre CEO Christine McCall whilst travelling built confidence skills and reduced anxiety for the Fellow. Also, the discussion of the dissemination of information for the report and guidance on researching the VET sector was valued by the Fellow from the Mentor.

The importance to the VET sector:

- A focus on combating disengagement from learning pathways by VET students when they experience the impacts of trauma including triggers, anxiety, flashbacks, and depression.
- Supporting and retaining VET practitioners to identify and seek assistance and support for adult learners with trauma.
- Engage with VET practitioners and their students' experiences to develop student support strategies for the portal that support and increase training and employment outcomes for students learning with trauma.
- Creating a holistic approach to adult learner support with a holistic wrap around support model that brings VET practitioners from both the teaching and the case worker environments together.

The Fellow's experience in delivery of the VET Reconnect program at Yarraville Community Centre over a 5-year period required Reconnect case workers (coaches) to case coordinate pathways and measurable outcomes to education and training for people with significant barriers that included mental health issues, financial hardship and CALD backgrounds. Wrap around support from both the caseworkers and teachers was integral in building support and trust spanning over 18 months.

Trauma is identified as the most prevalent barrier in starting or continuing education pathways for adult learners by VET teachers in Adult Learning Australia (ALA) webinars facilitated by the Fellow in 2020 and 2021.

Webinars invited direct questions and discussion to VET practitioners in what they are seeking in classroom supports and student welfare support. With 73 VET practitioners polled at the March 2021 webinar 69 identified a gap in support from VET for teachers working in classrooms with students impacted by trauma.

That trauma in their students presents as students being disconnected, not meeting learning aims, truancy through to more extreme instances of violence in the classroom with other students and/or directed at teachers.

Whilst triggers for trauma can present in any environment an adult learning environment presents many opportunities to be triggered and relies on teachers equipped with support and resources to create safe classroom environments for all students.

Teachers feeling equipped with skills and knowledge is vital in retaining quality VET practitioners within our sector.

An information portal for VET practitioners would provide an ongoing opportunity to connect.

It provides ongoing opportunities for the Victorian Skills Authority to directly connect with VET practitioners and steer the upskilling of trauma informed best practices in adult learning.

Providing a central point of support to ensure up to date information on supporting students with trauma that is accredited and endorsed by the VSA will result in VET practitioners feeling safer and equipped with a resource point in their work.

The Fellow's research showed that the NHS and UK Trauma council cites that one in three children and young people are exposed to at least one potentially traumatic event by the time they are 18.

Literature from New South Wales Health – Australia cites an estimated 57% to 75% of Australians will experience a potentially traumatic event in their lifetime.

Fellowship research indicates this exposure increases the risk of later mental health problems that would directly impact the ability as an adult to engage in a classroom setting. If VET practitioners are appropriately equipped with knowledge and resources that generate understanding of trauma, its impacts and triggers then appropriate interventions can be.

The Fellow communicated with The UK Trauma Council which is hosted and funded by the Anna Freud Centre and the NHS is a free evidence based online access point by a group of leading experts from a diverse expertise and professional practice in the UK. It is the first nationwide online access point collaborating resources in research, supports, policy and lived experience of trauma. The Fellow communicated around how their model of delivering this access point could be adapted by other entities.

Further literature from the Government Green Paper December 2017 Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision; "There is evidence that appropriately trained and supported staff such as teachers, counsellors, and teaching assistants can achieve results comparable to those achieved by trained therapists in delivering a number of interventions addressing mild to moderate mental health problems (such as anxiety, conduct disorder, substance use disorders and post-traumatic stress disorder)".

To supports the concept of a curated portal the Fellow visited adult learning community centres in the United Kingdom which are identified as creating and sharing innovative trauma supports including West London Welcome in Hammersmith and the New Citizens Gateway in West Finchley which are appropriately training and supporting their staff to be trauma informed.

Their objective is to bring about a whole organizational cultural shift where the wellbeing of all is the highest priority. They implement many interventions to ensure the relational and emotional health of all.

Fellowship findings support that adult community learning centres have become mentally healthy places for all. The value of wellbeing starts at the very top of priorities, making staff wellbeing as well as student wellbeing a key performance indicator as a registered training organisation.

The fundamental aim of this Fellowship was to explore best practices in supporting adults with trauma in education and training settings. By observing and connecting with the nominated organisations in the UK it became apparent that community organization settings provide essential supports to adult learners and are key in successful and meaningful outcomes in education and training pathways being completed.

Community Organisation leading best practise initiatives and resources for adult learners with trauma	Barrers their clients who are adult learners with trauma have previously experienced in education and training settings	What their adult learners were requesting in supports?	What Teachers and case workers from the organisation were seeking?	What initiatives and resources did the organisation implement to support adult learners with trauma?	How did these initiatives and resources improve the organisations teachers and case worker's delivery of supports?
New Citizens Gateway	Their asylum seeking/refugee journeys have been traumatic with physical and mental impacts	To be listened and heard. To have triggers identified and settings to be adjusted with triggers in mind	A centralised base to share information. What has worked for case workers and teachers and what hasn't worked	Classroom environment and training teachers on trauma informed practise	Increased student retention and increased employment outcomes after training course
West London Welcome	Most adult learners/clients are still residing in temporary accommodation of low standards two – three years of coming to the UK	The impact of uncertain living arrangements/ accommodations creates secondary trauma and often presents when in learning environments	Government departments to encourage and facilitate collaboration and resources sharing between funded organisations	Designing new classroom environments and collaboration between case workers and teachers	Adult learners reported increased sense of safety and increase in attendance

Community Organisation leading best practise initiatives and resources for adult learners with trauma	Barrers their clients who are adult learners with trauma have previously experienced in education and training settings	What their adult learners were requesting in supports?	What Teachers and case workers from the organisation were seeking?	What initiatives and resources did the organisation implement to support adult learners with trauma?	How did these initiatives and resources improve the organisations teachers and case worker's delivery of supports?
Homes for Ukraine	Many are still experiencing trauma and displacement from war and uncertainty of being able to return but feel pressure to find employment	How immediate their trauma experience has been and compounding trauma as the war continues in their home country. The pressure to enter learning and training for employment as the war continues for family back in the Ukraine	To learn from organisations who have been working with trauma in learning environments. Information sharing	Reaching out to case workers to provide wrap around supports for adults starting new training pathways	Adult learners reported feeling a sense of moving forward when case worker and teacher where in communication around supports

Education and Training is only successful for adults with trauma if teachers, the student and the case worker are case coordinating together. Teachers in adult training settings need free access to a portal of resources and information curated by a reliable source (Victorian Skills Authority) that is regularly reviewed and updated. A portal that seeks and implements resources and information from community and welfare organisations along with registered medical authorities to provide both teachers and case workers a framework that evolves with initiatives in supports for adult learners with trauma.

Key findings from UK organisations:

Individual organisations are developing and implanting initiatives and resources with trial and error in the UK and here in Australia. The Fellow identifies no current central reference point for information and resources organizations that have needed to develop their own approaches and resources with restricted funding and guidance. This creates a risk of further harm to adult learners but has also shown that community organisations that foster collaboration between teachers and case workers have demonstrated the ability to engage and listen to the needs of adult learners with trauma.

The Fellow observed and understood from UK organizations that when the adult learner has initially forged a trust relationship with their case worker the referral into adult learning is a pathway that requires the continued support of both case worker and teacher from commencement through to completion. By working together for wrap around support the pathway becomes resilient to barriers that may develop due to the triggers of trauma. Whilst case workers are generally trained in trauma informed practice there is a gap in trauma training for teachers of adult learners in Australia.

Mind in Croydon working with Croydon Community college recognizes “Perhaps now more than ever, adult educators are paying attention to the impact that personal and community trauma has on adult learners’ ability to learn and pursue their goals. While the reasons for this increased awareness are devastating, the turn toward mental health and trauma-informed practices in our classrooms and programs is welcome” - Michael Stanhope.

The strategies and resources on the proposed portal aim to reduce the impacts of trauma in adult learning settings, and to support increased pathways for learning by improving attentional, memory, and emotional behaviours. However, the resources could never replace or lessen the need for case workers and teachers to encourage and refer adult learners with trauma to treatment from qualified mental health professionals. For case workers and teachers of trauma-exposed learners in community organisations the portal will provide professional development opportunities and be proactive in the risk of secondary traumatic stress, compassion fatigue, and professional burnout. Case workers and teachers are continually exposed to and absorb adult learners’ trauma.

Mind in Croydon works to promote and enable good mental health, empowering people to lead a full life as part of their local community. The Fellow observed their work in supporting people with mental health problems and their relatives and carers, putting people at the heart of everything that they do.

<p>UK Organisation's visited.</p> <p>Participating through observation visits and interviews.</p>	<p>Resources and programs designed and implemented to reduce trauma's negative impact in training environments that may assist other organisations.</p>	<p>Practical strategies that address the significant adverse outcome of trauma in training and employment settings and the need to share these strategies</p>
<p>New Citizens Gateway</p> <p>Refugees and asylum seekers are among the most vulnerable of adult learners and have complex needs. Many have been subjected to violence and rape or have witnessed their family and friends being tortured or killed. Leaving behind their home, belongings and all that they were familiar with, they come to the UK facing many additional challenges, the main one being to build new lives for themselves in an unfamiliar and sometimes hostile environment, with poor linguistic skills.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advice & Information • Counselling & Emotional Support • English Classes (ESOL) with peer support workers • Youth Activities • Gardening Project (Ecotherapy) • Women's Group • Homework Club • End of Year Party • Mum's and Tots Group • Training & Workshops • Volunteering 	<p>NCG's years of experience of working with this group confirm that they have a remarkable degree of both resilience and resistance to any difficulties caused by their forced migration, and that, in a supportive and safe environment, they can adapt and rebuild their lives.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classroom configurations • Meditations • Sharing case studies
<p>West London Welcome</p> <p>Started by local people and first opened doors in 2018.</p> <p>Support for people leaving their own country under traumatic conditions, WLW strives to give people time. WLW works to build a safe, positive experience of community where strangers become friends.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English classes in open plan environments – no closed classrooms. Round tables and round robin teacher styles • Hot food served every day. • Events and outings • Legal advice 	<p>WLW work together to build a safe, positive experience of community where strangers can become friends.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide holistic support to support the needs of their members, from the practical and social to the emotional and playful. • Offer a range of educational and creative classes, activities, advice, food, and opportunities to make new and lasting friendships.

<p>The support options students with trauma are seeking from training programs both in the UK and Australia.</p>	<p>Strategies and resources Teachers and Caseworkers that have empowered their students with trauma to maintain engagement in training programs.</p>
<p>Adult learners at New Citizens Gateway strongly believe that while it is important to understand and address the mental, physical and practical problems of refugees, it is also respectful to honour their capacity for resilience.</p>	<p>A Women's Group, Jasmine, running for the past 10 years. The aim of this project is to support isolated BMER women and specifically support those with mental health issues through psycho-social activities. Jasmine provides a safe place for these women to socialize, meet and make new friends, and to acclimatize. In some instances, an outing to the Jasmine group session is the only thing they attend outside their homes.</p> <p>The group meets every week where they can participate in group activities such as outings, photography, art and crafts, health access or health promotion workshops and many other psycho-social activities.</p>
<p>Adult learners expressed that they seek warm, creative community spaces, together WLW support people to make new friends, teach and learn English, eat good hot food, share ideas, do activities, get advice, understand their rights, and support one another.</p>	<p>In 2022 WLW supported many of their adult learners from their education and training programs who were newly granted refugees and Ukrainians with homelessness casework in their partnership with Citizens Advice. The rental crisis and lack of affordable housing in London is especially difficult for those in this community. When asylum-seeking people are granted Leave to Remain, they are evicted from the accommodation organised by the Home Office and face homelessness. Likewise, Ukrainians whose hosting term has expired are in the same difficulty. Renting from the private sector is incredibly difficult given that they have no credit history or savings to put down a deposit. This leaves our advisors working overtime to find temporary emergency housing or searching for sympathetic landlords and neither are easy options. By working with Case workers, Teachers were able to understand the experiences of their students and work together to support.</p>

UK Organisation's visited. Participating through observation visits and interviews.	Resources and programs designed and implemented to reduce trauma's negative impact in training environments that may assist other organisations.	Practical strategies that address the significant adverse outcome of trauma in training and employment settings and the need to share these strategies
<p>Yaran Club</p> <p>a non-profit constituted organization supporting Farsi speaking women (Afghan, Iranian, Kurdish, Tajik) experiencing mental health issues. Many are asylum seekers or refugees experiencing isolation, depression or domestic violence. Mos with low levels of English.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity to make friends. • Support to build up confidence and to recognize adult learners' abilities and strengths. 	<p>By providing adult learners activities outside their home the club have been witnessing less depression and by building up routines for women which has enhanced their wellbeing and self-confidence. The volunteers and teachers are women who have experienced mental health issues themselves and understand the problems".</p>
<p>Homes for Ukraine</p> <p>Derek, an entrepreneur, and philanthropist has decided to start Homes for Ukraine with the aim of making the process of relocating to the UK simpler and safer for displaced Ukrainians. Much of Derek's time is presently spent near the Poland/Ukraine border of Korczowa-Krakovets, where he helps refugees.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting Ukrainian citizens find safe refuge in the UK through a foster family home network. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish contact with refugees and obtain all necessary documents and information for visa application submission and host identification. • identify a trusted host and a suitable home for our refugees, ensuring all relevant background and security checks are performed, and that the accommodation is adequate.
<p>Mind in Croydon</p> <p>Mind in Croydon is a mental health charity founded in 1967 and since then has developed into a significant provider of mental health services in Croydon.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educates and provides services. • Campaigns and raises funds. • Works in partnership with other relevant organisations • Values diversity and focuses on quality. • Involves service users and other volunteers in its work. 	<p>Active Minds Program promotes physical and mental wellbeing by supporting people with experience of a mental health problem to make healthy lifestyle changes to benefit both physical and mental health. We break down the barriers faced when taking part in sport and activities in the local community. We have trained volunteers who can support you to take part in your chosen activity.</p>

<p>The support options students with trauma are seeking from training programs both in the UK and Australia.</p>	<p>Strategies and resources Teachers and Caseworkers that have empowered their students with trauma to maintain engagement in training programs.</p>
<p>Women with acute trauma are seeking supports in adult learning that is sensitive and delivered with appropriate cultural understanding of the issues.</p>	<p>“We arrange exercise & dancing, English language, therapeutic art and mindfulness and wellbeing sessions for them every week. All our classes are facilitated by experienced and skilled teachers in the field”. Nia - Club member</p>
<p>Case collaboration between families, case workers and teachers from adult learning centres that newly arrived Ukrainians attend.</p>	<p>Homes for Ukraine continue to offer support to displaced Ukrainians even after they arrive in the UK.</p> <p>Once refugees have settled into their new homes, ensure they have access to resources which will allow them to assimilate into life in the UK.</p>
<p>Mind in Croydon’s Social Networking Service, known as The Hub, is based in central Croydon and provides support for people who are experiencing or recovering from mental health problems to engage in activities in the community as part of their recovery.</p> <p>The Hub also provides a safe place for people who are lonely and isolated to meet and socialize with people and a place for them to receive practical help and advice.</p>	<p>Mind in Croydon is working to promote good mental health. It seeks to empower people to lead a full life as part of their local community.</p>

The Fellow's learnings in visiting the above organizations are to experience the best practice that teachers and caseworkers are using together in adult learning environments to support meaningful pathways for learners with trauma.

24

The key finding of the Fellow is that teachers and caseworkers who create resources based on their knowledge and experience in collaboration are achieving increased outcomes of education and training for adult learners. All are seeking a way to share these resources and learnings with colleagues to create further professional development and safety in trauma informed practice.

7. Sector Engagement (Dissemination)

Support of the research outlined in this Fellowship and its continued dissemination by Yarraville Community Centre and in adult learning environments across Victoria.

The Fellow has observed changes and increased awareness in approaches to teacher and case worker support collaborations for adult learners. Through discussion led webinars of the Fellowship topic through Adult Learning Australia both teachers and case workers from the VET sector engaged with research experiences in the UK by the Fellow and expressed further interest in participating in ideas for design and access to a proposed portal.

Yarraville Community Centre as a registered training organisation and a trusted access point for vulnerable community members to receive referrals and support has supported the Fellow to lead discussions with peers both as teachers and case workers on the impact of trauma at the frontline, in our classrooms across Yarraville, Footscray and Neighbourhood houses Victoria. Yarraville Community Centre is the true example of community led support that is person focused and has developed many traumas informed practices and training for its staff across courses and programs but is seeking a central trusted platform to access resources and tools.

Sector Engagement (Dissemination)

Adult Learning Australia	Bi - Monthly webinars to host discussion on teachers experiences in adult learning classrooms in supporting students with Trauma. https://ala.asn.au/ala-webinar-building-trauma-informed-supports-in-adult-learning/
VET Development Centre (VDC)	November 2023 Conference - Guest Speaker to speak on Fellowship topic and overseer's observations
Project Respect	August 2023 - Guest speaker at Federal Government Roundtable discussion on the trauma recovery of victims of sex trafficking and pathways to recovery. Will speak on Fellowship aims and learnings.
Blind Citizens Victoria	Facilitator for Eye to the Future Employment program on designing courses and pathways for people with a disability who identify trauma as a barrier to training and employment. Will share Fellowship findings.
Neighbourhood Houses Victoria	Facilitating Staff Professional development workshops in 2024 around recognising and supporting students in adult classrooms with trauma for VET practitioners of Neighbourhood houses Victoria.
Disability Advisory Council for Maribyrnong Council	2023 - 2024 - Advisor on Trauma being recognized by Council as local government and our local communities as a significant barrier for adults completing training and education pathways and its impact on employment issues.

8. Conclusion

Reflecting upon the observations of organisations in the United Kingdom and drawing comparisons with current Victorian approaches it is concluded that significant advances in the supports and outcomes of adult learners with trauma are achieved when both teachers and caseworkers collaborate with appropriate resources to provide safe learning environments. Teachers who work together with case workers are trauma-informed and equipped with knowledge and support for learners and their needs.

26

From the Fellow's experience in observing best practice and seeking the experiences and professional development requests from VET practitioners it is founded that a central access point in the form of an online portal that is curated by the Victorian Skills Authority is required to meet the trauma support needs of adult learners, their teachers and case workers. This resource and tool portal must be a trusted entity that is up to date and moderated for its purpose.

Measurable and meaningful education and training outcomes are sustained long term for adult learners with barriers of trauma only through collaboration and acknowledgement that trauma is a significant barrier to reaching outcomes. The portal will be a foundation to build an impactful response to support the needs of VET practitioners.

Benefits to VET providers would be a comprehensive, multifaceted toolkit along with professional development to enable best practice training delivery to this cohort.

A toolkit of strategies for VET practitioners to implement in their learning environment would combat disengagement and disadvantage to successfully complete their course.

Literature supports "The invisible yet powerful web of relationships that effective educators create between themselves and learners, and between and among learners, is crucial to an optimal learning environment (Perry, 2006). In sum, the necessary sense of safety to encourage adult learning comes from consistent, nurturing, and sensitive attention to the learner's state of mind" (Daloz, 1999)

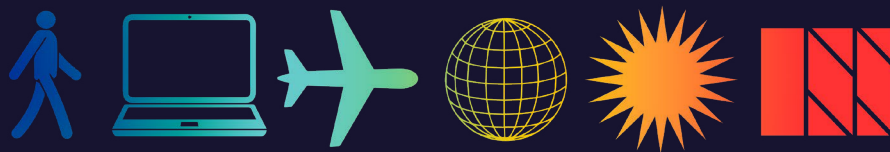
In the Fellow's learnings it is not always possible for teachers or even case workers to know which adult learners in their class have experienced trauma and the individual triggers and impacts impacted. Teachers and caseworkers can support highly stressed adult learners by remembering that the adult learner experiencing the stress response is in a state of fear that is best responded to by providing trauma informed practice.

This international experience in observing best practice and bringing research findings to assist in building a better VET PTSD framework that provides researched methods of communication skills between students and VET practitioners along with skills around promoting coping skills and interactions with others and seeking professional support in the local area.

Research that highlights resources and practice for VET practitioners to feel confident in addressing the impacts of PTSD with students and confidence that the strategies will be designed to enhance pathway plans and sustainable course and employment outcomes for adult learners.

9. References

- Benjet, C., Bromet, E., Karam, E.G., Kessler, R.C., McLaughlin, K.A., Ruscio, A.M., Koenen, K.C. (2015). The epidemiology of traumatic event exposure worldwide: results from the World Mental Health Survey Consortium. *Psychological Medicine*, 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0033291715001981>
- Daloz, L. A. *Mentor: Guiding the Journey of Adult Learners*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999
- 28 Gross, K. (2019) Trauma Impacts Adult Learners: Here's Why. Retrieved from: The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning
- Kessler, R.C., Sonnega, A., Bromet, E., Hughes, M., & Nelson, C.B. (1995). Posttraumatic stress disorder in the national comorbidity survey. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 52, 1048–1060.
- Kilpatrick, D.G., Resnick, H.S., Milanak, M.E., Miller, M.W., Keyes, K.M., & Friedman, M.J. (2013). National estimates of exposure to traumatic events and PTSD prevalence using DSM-IV and DSM-5 criteria. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 26, 537–547. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jts>.
- Perry, B. D. "Applying Principles of Neurodevelopment to Clinical Work with Maltreated and Traumatized Children: The Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics." In N. Boyd Webb (ed.), *Working with Traumatized Youth in Child Welfare*. New York: Guilford Press, 2006.
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2014a). SAMHSA's concept of trauma and guidance for a trauma-informed approach (HHS Publication No. 14-4884).
- More Important than Ever: Trauma-informed Adult Education January 5th, 2022, BLOG <https://worlded.org/more-important-than-ever-trauma-informed-adult-education/>



The International Specialised Skills Institute
1/189 Faraday Street, Carlton VIC 3053
Ph: 03 9347 4583
www.issinstitute.org.au