

***Men's learning and wellbeing
through community organisations in Western Australia***

Report to the Western Australia Department of Education & Training

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Executive Summary

- This is a major field-based study for the Western Australia Department of Education and Training by a research team from the University of Ballarat.
- It is an exploration of the benefits of men's learning through participation in community settings *other than* those understood as having a vocational or educational dimension.
- It is based on an analysis of extensive audio-recorded and transcribed interviews and surveys in 36 organisations in six diverse sites across Western Australia.
- The six community organisation types explored were: adult and community education; sporting; religious, Indigenous and cultural; voluntary fire and emergency services; age-related and disability as well as men's special interest organisations.
- As a major learning-related study it is unique in two senses. First, it is informed solely by men as participants in community-based organisations. Second, it analyses men's learning as a wellbeing phenomena with diverse and important wellbeing outcomes.
- The first part of the results comprises an analysis of quantitative survey data (N=187) related to men's learning and wellbeing by organisation type and employment status.
- The second part of the results uses qualitative data from interviews to look closely at what learning and wellbeing are experienced by men. It does this by means of participant narratives about learning and wellbeing related to participation in the six community organisation types.
- The research provides new evidence of the acute need for organisations providing adult learning in community settings in Western Australia to consider how to engage more men and to promote men's wellbeing more effectively.
- Conversely, the research suggests the need for health and wellbeing organisations in Western Australia to enhance men's wellbeing through learning in ways that might avoid the need for social, behavioural, medical or clinical intervention in their lives as a first step.
- Informal community involvement, where men become co-participants in a shared activity, has the advantage of avoiding the problematization and patronising of men as students or clients from a skills deficit or ageist model. Community men's sheds as well as fire and emergency service organisations do this particularly well.
- The research recognizes and celebrates men's multiple identities, not only as workers, but also as experienced, wise and knowledgeable individuals who have the capacity to add value to community organisations across Western Australia in diverse spaces and places.
- The research identifies evidence of the capacity for a wide range of community organisations to address many of the internationally recognized Determinants of Disadvantage for men, particularly: social exclusion, unemployment, stress, substance abuse and inadequate nutrition.
- The research confirms and explores the important role that all community organisations examined play, in providing contexts in which all aspects of lifelong and lifewide learning can be practiced and enhanced for, by and with men as active participants.
- Community-based organisations are found to provide unique and powerful contexts in which men can develop and express all aspects of communication identified in the Australian Core Skills Framework. These include expressing their multiple identities, interacting in groups, performing tasks, using tools and technologies, interacting in organisations and with the wider community.
- While adult, community and vocational educational education and training are important, there is a missing 'first step' in Western Australia for some men who are unemployed, as well as for some men with a disability, in poor health or in retirement.
- Adult and community education tends to be missing, less accessible to or less appropriate for men in Western Australian regional communities such as Carnarvon and Albany.
- Community-based organisations play a particularly important role in men's productive ageing, as a bridge to later life and a means of enhancing lifelong learning and wellbeing beyond paid work.
- We provide evidence that learning at any age through community organisations in Western Australia has the capacity to greatly enhance men's wellbeing.
- There is scope for a wide range of community-based organisations in Western Australia to acknowledge and promote men's wellbeing as a primary purpose, to engage a wider range of men and to value and respect men's preferred and sometimes different ways of learning.

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We could not have undertaken this research without the trust, support and cooperation of the many people and community organisations in the six sites, listed alphabetically by site:

- *Albany*: Activ Albany, Albany Maritime Foundation (Boat Shed), Albany Aboriginal Heritage Reference Group, Albany Sea Rescue, Albany Speedway Club and Great Southern TAFE Albany.
- *Carnarvon*: Carnarvon Fire & Rescue, Carnarvon Medical Service Aboriginal Corporation, Carnarvon Senior Citizens Club, Central West TAFE Carnarvon, Gascoyne Off Road Racing Club, Police & Citizens Youth Club Carnarvon and Gascoyne Masonic Lodge.
- *Denham/Shark Bay*: Denham Volunteer Fire Brigade, Shark Bay Pistol Club, Shark Bay Silver Chain, Shark Bay Telecentre and St Andrews Anglican Church Shark Bay.
- *Denmark*: Denmark Anglican Church, Denmark Arts Council, Denmark Environment Centre, Denmark Over 50s Association, Denmark Surf Life Saving Club, Denmark Telecentre, Denmark Volunteer Fire & Rescue and Woodturners of Denmark.
- *Fremantle*: Fremantle Men's Shed, Glyde-In Community Learning Centre, Hilton Park Bowling & Recreation Club, Silver Chain Nursing Association, The Meeting Place.
- *Kwinana*: Challenger TAFE, Kwinana Bowling Club, Kwinana Fire & Emergency Services, Kwinana RSL, Kwinana Salvation Army and Kwinana Senior Citizens' Club.

Our particular thanks to the men involved in each of these organisations who generously volunteered their time to be interviewed and who completed our survey. We relied heavily on contact people, typically volunteers in each organisation, to help set up the audio-recorded interviews, to distribute the surveys and to assist us getting them back completed. Our unusually high response rate to a six page mailed survey is only partly as a consequence of researcher effort. It is largely a result of these men and women's strong support for our research.

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Abstract

This study is an exploration of men's learning that occurs through participation in community organisations in Western Australia. Data and evidence for this study has been collected from male participants in six different types of community organisations across six different locations in Western Australia. The six different types of community organisation identified for the study were categorised as (1) adult and community education (ACE), (2) sporting, (3) religious, Indigenous and cultural, (4) voluntary fire or emergency services, (5) age-related and disability and, (6) men's special interest organisations. Data were collected from a total of 34 community organisations. The six locations visited in the study were chosen to provide an opportunity to collect data from a cross section of inner and outer metropolitan, regional, rural and remote areas.

Because of the huge volume of data created from the interviews and surveys, this report should be regarded as a first cut from a large and very complex and multi-layered 'cake' sampled in one huge and diverse Australian state. As a major learning-related study this research is unique, not only by being informed solely by men as informants, but particularly by men as participants in voluntary, community-based organisations. Its other unique feature is its attempt to analyse learning as a wellbeing phenomenon, not only in terms of participant intentions but also in terms of the outcomes reported by the participants.

Our research provides evidence that adult learning occurs as part of participation in, and the running of, activities within all community organisations, not just those who are explicitly aiming to provide adult education and training. Further, the evidence suggests that there is an acute need for organisations providing adult learning to consider how to promote men's inclusion and wellbeing more effectively. Conversely, it suggests the need for health and wellbeing advocates and providers to recognize the ability of community organisations to enhance men's wellbeing through informal learning in ways that might provide a less client-driven imperative for social, behavioural, medical or clinical intervention in men's lives, and that in some instances this may be a strategy that provides a significant first step.

Community involvement has the advantage of avoiding the patronising of men as clients, customers or students from a skills deficit or ageist model as might be the case in some training programs. Rather it recognizes and celebrates men's multiple identities, not only as workers or former workers, but also for men, as experienced, wise and knowledgeable, and who have the agency and capacity to add value to their community.

On the basis of our evidence, we conclude that community-based organisations are providing a critically important first step for men of all ages for interacting and developing identities beyond or in addition to their working and family lives. We conclude that adult, community and vocational educational education and training are important, but sometimes there is a missing first step for some men who are on their way back to work as well as those who are moving beyond the workplace in Western Australia.

Introduction

This Western Australian research is one of two major Australian field-based studies of men's learning and wellbeing beyond the workplace. Unlike our other major, parallel study for National Seniors Australia Productive Aging Centre (Golding, Foley, Brown & Harvey 2009) that was focused on men over 50 in three southeastern Australian states, the current research is inclusive of men of all ages and restricted to one state. It investigates and compares men's attitudes towards and experiences of learning, and in particular what is referred to in the adult learning literature as non-formal and informal learning in six diverse sites in the state of Western Australia. It is the first of several strategically planned, Australian and international studies of learning by men, inclusive of men beyond the workplace.

Most educational research is based around mainly younger people who are learning formally in educational programs and being assessed in order to gain work, obtain a work-related qualification or to change employment. Such research tends, unsurprisingly, to identify men as 'missing' from most adult learning organisations once they are older and in work. Research from a range of fields shows that men's wellbeing and learning are often very tightly associated with their paid work, and that men sometimes struggle with adverse changes to their identities and wellbeing as they grow older. What is less well known is what men learn beyond the workplace, including once they become unemployed, withdraw from the workforce or retire. While deliberately inclusive of men still in work, our study investigates men's learning experiences associated with their involvement in community-based organisations. Our first intention is to explore men's learning that is not necessarily related to paid work and that occurs through participation in activities associated with community organisations. Our second and related intention is to simultaneously examine wellbeing implications and outcomes of that learning that are rarely examined or considered. By talking with and surveying men voluntarily involved in a wide range of community organisations as well as in adult learning in Western Australia, we were able to gain perspectives about and compare learning and wellbeing for a wide cross section of organisations and men.

Our study involved six sites in three regions of Western Australia where men of various ages, cultural, economic and social backgrounds were already learning informally and non-formally through community engagement in groups. Our purpose was to analyze the nature and benefits of that engagement in learning beyond the workplace to the wellbeing of the men, their families and communities. The overall aim was to find out what is attractive, common and different about group settings that work for men, including but not restricted to men not in paid work, to identify better ways to engage and benefit men in learning through active community involvement beyond the workplace. One anticipated outcome was an improved knowledge of how to improve the attractiveness, reach and effectiveness of existing adult and community education (ACE) and vocational education and training (VET) in Western Australia for men beyond the workplace.

This research into men's learning through participation in activities associated with community organisations is considered timely in the context of:

- concerns about men's attitudes to and involvement in formal, lifelong, community and adult learning
- concerns about wellbeing for the growing proportion of men not involved in the paid workforce (unemployed, working voluntarily, retired or with a disability)
- a poor knowledge of what difference community involvement makes to men's learning and wellbeing
- pessimism about the value of formal, lower level training for re-integrating displaced males into the workforce
- perceptions that skill shortages may be associated with some men's early withdrawal from the workforce, aging in regional and rural communities and retirement
- a recognition that low labour force participation, particularly amongst older men, is not only affected by but is likely to be causally related to a decrease in wellbeing.

Research questions and rationale

The research questions were:

- What shapes attitudes towards learning and work of men not in paid work in relatively socially disadvantaged communities in Western Australia? How do location, class, culture and men's different masculinities affect these attitudes?
- Which learning environments engage economically inactive men, for what reasons and with what outcomes?
- What learning roles do different types of community organisations play?
- What is the relationship between informal group affiliation and learning in community contexts, and the wellbeing of men, their families and communities?
- What can be done to positively re-engage men (including men not in work) in learning through community engagement?

In order to answer these questions, a field-based, mixed method study was used to investigate men's attitudes towards learning in Western Australia. Three regions were selected that are known to be relatively socially disadvantaged and where prime male economic inactivity rates (proportion of men not in paid work) are above State average. The intention was to identify and study contexts in which men were likely to already be learning through engagement in community activity.

The research adds to the body of knowledge of the learning and wellbeing-related role of community-based organisations for isolated, often 'working class' men. The research aids in the understanding of why some men not in paid work are typically not formally learning. The insights and findings about why some men don't work and don't learn have potential significant benefits to adult and community education and vocational education and training (VET) providers including private registered training organisations (RTOs) that target disengaged men. It adds to the body of knowledge about how men's learning might benefit men as well as their partners, children, families and communities, that are sometimes subject to some men's frustration, hostile attitudes and violence and that are often tightly associated with social disadvantage and unemployment (Vinson 2007).

One other anticipated outcome of the project is an identification of learning strategies that are positive and therapeutic for men. The research starts from the premise that men not in work can *pose problems for themselves, their families and the community*, but that men in this situation are not necessarily *the* problem. The research design therefore has the potential to identify ways of breaking intergenerational cycles of unemployment for men through community involvement. One final but important anticipated outcome of the project is an identification of opportunities for marginalised men who are 'living on the edge' to interact with other men to develop positive masculine identities and to enhance opportunities for learning through interaction with other men in community contexts.

Our research approach is field-based, grounded and mixed method. We relied on site interviews and surveys exploring the learning and wellbeing related experiences of men as participants in community-based organisations. We used audio-recorded and transcribed focus group interviews and a six-page survey, handed out by a contact person in the organisation to the participants and returned by mail. Our research design (rightly) anticipated that men involved as volunteers in diverse community organisations would also be diverse in terms of their learning interests and work status. We are not able, using this method, to draw conclusions about other men not in work, nor in adult education, nor involved in community-based organisations. We can only surmise that such men are much more likely, through their apparent community and vocational disconnection, to be restricted in their everyday interaction to family and friends, and be much more vulnerable than men we have researched and written about. Such men are very difficult to ethically identify, objectively study and actively involve in research.

Context for the research

In Western Australia

This research into the value of learning and wellbeing across a wide range of community organisations in Western Australian urban, regional, rural and remote locations is particularly timely in the light of the Western Australia's, late 2009¹, proposed 'shake-up of TAFE (Technical and Further Education and Training) Colleges. The intent is to produce more workers for the mining, oil and gas industries at the expense of so-called recreational courses'. As *The West Australian* Editorial of 2 September (p.20) put it, 'there is concern that the community education component of TAFE could become redundant or placed beyond the financial reach of those who have slipped through the cracks of the school system and are trying to find a way back into education', It warned that 'the State should be able to maintain an education system which provides for the community's needs, in other areas as well.

In the same week the Australian Industry Group² warned that almost half of working age Australians already have less than the minimum literacy and numeracy levels required to meet the demands of everyday work, posing safety and productivity issues for Australian businesses.

This research builds on separate social, health and wellbeing concerns, first noted in Western Australia a decade ago in a 1999 review of the use by men of family and parent services by the Western Australian Family and Children's Services (FCS 1999: now Department for Community Development). As Learning Centre Link (2004, p.3) noted in their *Bringing in the blokes* study,

One of the triggers for the review was a concern for the trauma experienced by men and the alarmingly high incidence of men's depression and suicide particularly in rural areas. There was also a general awareness that men should be encouraged to access support services more, or earlier than they do.

Community neighborhood and learning centres are recognized in many (but not all) parts of Australia as important and an effective way of reaching adult learners in community settings. The network of centres in Western Australia and the services, courses and programs run through them have 'are, and always have been, open to all members of the community' (LCL 2004, p.5).

Historically, however Centres developed as a response to women's needs and because of the high participation of women, both as participants and as management, they have been geared mainly towards women. (LCL 2004, p.5)

Acknowledging that men tend not to come to some learning centres and neighborhood houses in Western Australia, Learning Centre Link (2004) facilitated a small study that identified several possible reasons for men not accessing centres. These included men's image and perception of centres as places for women, men's images and perceptions of themselves as being self-coping and self-reliant, the infrastructure not being conducive to men specific or male appropriate services, limited programs of interest to men and practical considerations that preclude men from accessing centres. Several of these images and perceptions about men's use of adult and community education are followed up in the current study.

In Australia

This study of adult male inclusion and exclusion is extremely timely in the context of the Australian national government's social inclusion agenda and the August 2009 *Engage* consultation paper subtitled *Learn, work, engage have a voice*. The community organisations in the current research are collectively characterized in that paper (Engage 2009, p.2, citing Prof Mark Lyons 2003) as the Third Sector:

...a broad range of organisations that are "formed by people to provide services for themselves or for others, to advance a cause, to share an enthusiasm, to preserve a tradition, to worship a god or gods. Different groups of these organisations are known by different names: non-government organisations (NGOs), charities, unions, cooperatives, clubs, associations, people's organisations, churches, temples, mosques and so on."

¹ *The West Australian*, 'Training shake-up to feed the boom', September 1, 2009, p.1 Headline.

² *The Age*, Poor worker literacy 'hurting business', 31 August 2009, p.5.

This study's inclusion and exploration of men's wellbeing is also timely in that it has been conducted in parallel with the development of Australia's first National Men's Health Policy (DHA 2008).

Uncritically attaching ourselves as researchers to such superficially attractive national agendas but associated (and sometimes diverse) community discourses, as alluded to in our conclusion, is not without its potential pitfalls. Shaw (2009) recently cautioned in Scotland about

... the way in which community is increasingly contrived and controlled through policy. In the restructured welfare state, community has become both an alibi and a substitute for the hollowed out and depleted state.

As Levitas (2000, p.194) suggested, one of the pitfalls of us elevating some aspects of community (particularly volunteer) provision above government provision through our research is that the role of community can be seen by governments as mopping up '... the ill effects of the market and to provide the conditions for its continued operation, while the costs of this are borne by individuals rather than the state'.

The learning themes in the current study follows up on research findings from Golding, Harvey and Echter (2005) in Victoria, the most similar, previous comparative study of learning through community-based organisations in Australia. While the 2005 study did not involve interviews and was restricted to small towns, it included surveys of men in somewhat similar organisations: in ACE, volunteer fire brigades, Australian rules football clubs, landcare organisations and senior citizens clubs.

Fire and emergency service organisations were separately studied as learning organisations in small and remote towns in four Australian states by Hayes, Golding and Harvey (2004) using a, multi-site, mixed method approach similar to that used in the current study. That study included four fire and emergency service organisations in four small town sites in the Great Southern region of Western Australia.

Our national, four state study, *Men's sheds in Australia: learning through community contexts* research (Golding, Brown, Foley, Harvey & Gleeson 2007) for NCVER (National Centre for Vocational Education Research) also used mixed field research including data and evidence gained from community men's sheds in Western Australia. It provides a window into the informal learning needs of some older men in a relatively new set of men's grassroots organisations that have continued to proliferate and spread including in Western Australia³. This new field research in Western Australia, based on interviews conducted in 2009 sought to extend that research to wider areas of men's learning and community involvement. It specifically sought to explore intersections between Lattimore's (2007) recent desk-based research into the particular needs of men not in work in Australia and Vinson's (2007) findings about the distribution of disadvantage in Western Australia.

This Western Australian research specifically focused on and identified the learning needs of men (unemployed, withdrawn from the workforce or retired) in Western Australia in four regions (two metropolitan, two rural or regional) known from Vinson (2007) to be experiencing particular disadvantage. Rather than restricting the survey and interview sample to men not in work, all men who participated in community-based organisations were invited to take part, on the assumption (backed up by the results, that only 43 per cent of respondents identified that they were 'in the paid workforce' and 47 per cent were retired from the paid workforce) that many men involved would not be in the paid workforce. This has enabled us to compare the responses of men not in work with men in work in the same organisations.

While designed as a stand alone Department of Education and Training project in six Western Australian sites, the research method was deliberately designed, with data from a parallel National Seniors Australia Productive Ageing Centre (NSPAC) study (Golding, Brown, Foley & Harvey 2009) of older men (age over 50) in three other Australian states (Tasmania, New South Wales and South Australia), to contribute a comparable Australian data set to an international study. The international study is envisaged to eventually include sites in some or all of England, Scotland,

³ The first Western Australian, state-based men's shed conference was held in Mukinbudin on 3-4 September 2009.

Northern Ireland, New Zealand, Australia and Republic of Ireland. That research involves a number of overseas collaborating universities, researchers, adult and community education organisations and overseas bodies including NIACE (National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education) in the UK. The research expands on the small amount of recent international research in this field, particularly McGivney's (1999a, 1999b, 2004) groundbreaking research in the UK on men's avoidance of formal learning and the benefits of informal learning in communities.

Limitations of the research

There is an assumption in some learning research that it is possible to write without accounting for history and place. As researchers we hold that this assumption is not possible anywhere, and certainly not in Western Australia. While Western Australia is very much part of Australia it has distinctively different histories as a state and within the state. By virtue of its huge size spanning temperate, tropical and desert environments, Western Australia also has considerable internal social, cultural and economic diversity. Though its eastern border is shared with South Australia and Northern Territory with which it shares some affinities, its community and public institutions have tended to develop differently from those in some other parts of Australia. Its capital Perth, though a large, modern, booming city is more physically remote from similar sized cities than almost any other place in the world. While most peak bodies are located in Perth it is a long way geographically and culturally between its extremities.

We were not able in this project to capture the diversity in this huge state with a disproportionate number of people living in the more fertile and well-watered south west and also along the coast. However we deliberately included three diverse regions to collect sufficient data to provide a snapshot of learning and wellbeing from men who participate in community based organisations. The two selected sites in urban Perth (Kwinana and Fremantle), the regional and rural Great Southern region (Albany and Denmark) and remote and very remote Gascoyne region (Carnarvon and Denham) were similarly selected because of their diversity and difference.

The research method and instruments proposed are tested, effective and highly ethical. Like other projects led by Golding since 2001, we deliberately sought to work *with* communities and community organisations and feed the information back in ways that respects and values respondents and their organisations. This method combined with prior, on site reconnaissance and working through known and trusted informants leads the observed relatively high response rate of 54 per cent.

As alluded to above, interviewing and surveying men involved in community organisations in three regions and six populated localities is insufficient to provide a comprehensive picture of learning and wellbeing for men in Western Australia. The achieved survey sample (N=187) with a relatively high response rate of 48 per cent across 35 organisations in six categories is nevertheless sufficient to provide a hitherto unseen view of learning that is seldom glimpsed. As Gallacher, Ingram and Field (2009, p.226) recently observed in an international critique of our wider research endeavor, including this project, in *Researching transitions in lifelong learning*, an important aspect of our work

... is that it brings out the importance of activities that would not normally be defined as learning, in that they are not part of any formal learning structures, but they provide valued opportunities for the men involved to make transitions from their working lives, and the activities that have engaged them there, which are in many ways familiar to them, but provide new learning opportunities as well.

Another limitation is that apart from the community based ACE (adult and community education) sector, we have not looked for or included learning through other forms of more organized, formal, vocational or higher learning in our analysis, such as elsewhere in technical and further education (TAFE), private providers and university. Our focus on learning and wellbeing for men *beyond* formal learning organisations is very deliberate. Other research demonstrates an under-representation of men (and boys) in formal education, as well as in community-based adult education, particularly for older men (Golding 2009; McGivney 1999a, 1999b, 2004). Focusing only on the experiences and attitudes of younger men in Western Australia who are learning formally

and often successfully in tertiary institutions in the larger cities – despite men’s overall under-representation - would provide a very narrow research snapshot.

While relatively small as a proportion of the total state population, in most of the land area of Western Australia outside of the southwest Aboriginal people are in a majority. Our research does not and cannot adequately deal with Aboriginal men’s learning issues. While we attempted to be inclusive of Aboriginal organisations and participants in all six sites, Aboriginal wariness of the agendas of outside, non-Indigenous researchers is still strong and widespread. In sites where Aboriginal people comprise a significant proportion of the population, such as in Carnarvon, Aboriginal people were much less likely to be involved in most categories of community organisations.

A final limitation relates to an inevitable bias in a site, organisation type and organisation sample that was not randomly chosen. We set out to look at six discrete organisation categories in each of six selected sites. The organisations we actually selected for study, from the large number of available organisations (particularly sporting organisations) in each site within each of the categories, though not made randomly, aimed to provide evidence of the diversity rather than being representative statistically. In the larger cities the available choice was much larger and our selection was based more on trying to represent diversity across the sites and organisation categories rather than to provide a representative sample within site. Inevitably, our sample was also restricted to those organisations and men willing and able to participate in the surveys and interviews. By ethically setting up interviews in collaboration with informants within each participating organisation we tended to deal more with, and also interview more men holding responsible (though voluntary) positions within those organisations. It is likely also that men who volunteered for interview, and particularly for completing the survey, were more formally literate and more interested in the issues being explored. Some interviews were inevitably held at times that precluded the involvement of some men with paid work roles. In several organisations the logistics of getting a group of men in a room at the same time on the same day proved insurmountable. In one case (Denham), the interview day coincided with the search for a lost yachtsman, that took most of the men who had agreed to be interviewed out of town.

Despite these difficulties, the survey response rates (and also number of returns), to a survey ostensibly about learning, were almost counter intuitively significantly less from men involved in adult and community education than from organisations that are less likely to be conventionally regarded as learning organisations. It is surmised that even the men that *are* involved as participants in adult and community education in Western Australia are less connected or actively involved in the organisation as men in the other categories of organisations. Presumably they were also harder to recruit as interviewees and less likely to complete or return surveys. By contrast, the response rates from fire and emergency services, churches, cultural and Indigenous organisations were approximately twice those of returns from adult and community education organisations. Similarly, there is a mild over representation in the achieved sample of men from smaller populated localities and smaller organisations by virtue of the relative ease of following up and a place-related pride associated with many small, particularly rural organizations.

Literature review

Recent literature (Lattimore 2007) showed that Australian men who are economically inactive comprise a large and growing proportion of all men. Apart from the significant loss of economic activity associated with men’s non-participation in the labour market, it has a devastating social impact on men, their families and communities and requires costly social welfare intervention and support. Lattimore (2007) identified a reduced tolerance in contemporary economies for employing men with disabilities and lower skills as well as the feminisation of many new forms of work as some of the factors affecting men’s non-participation in paid work. Lattimore also showed that economically inactive men tend to group together spatially. Our recent research cited below shows that un-partnered men, men without other community connections and men who did not enjoy or benefit from school are particularly vulnerable to labour market withdrawal. Our research also anticipates that such men might benefit socially and in terms of their attitudes to learning from

regular and informal community involvement with other men. The particular issue for adult and community education and vocational education and training (VET) is that the very men who appear most to need formal literacies and vocational retraining are the least likely to have the attitudes and skills necessary to participate in and benefit from it.

The research was framed in the context of the relatively pessimistic international literature on the value of formal training for re-integrating displaced older males in the workforce (Lattimore 2007 p.187) and the perceived national need (COAG Feb 2006) to improve educational opportunities for adults with no formal qualifications in order to improve their employment prospects. The research set out to identify and examine the benefits of community involvement, particularly improved attitudes towards learning, for socially disadvantaged men, including men who are not in paid work. The deliberate emphasis was on men in relatively disadvantaged locations and regions in Western Australia. For this reason, the site selection criteria was for six places in Western Australia in three regions, with a diverse range of accessibility/remoteness indicators (measured objectively by the revised Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia ARIA+), all of which have more men not in the workforce than the Western Australian average.

This research rationale, design and sample locations were informed by intersections between our suite of Australian field research into aspects of men's learning and very recent findings by both Lattimore (2007) and Vinson (2007). There is a striking similarity between the distribution of men of prime age not in work (in Lattimore) and the distribution of social disadvantage (in Vinson). Research into ageing (Ageing Australia 2001; Productivity Commission 2005) suggest that while men age 40-49 years are the largest ten year age cohort in Australia they are increasingly likely to leave paid employment early. These economically inactive men of working age are much more likely to have no formal post-school qualifications and live or move to areas of concentrated and intersecting social and labor market disadvantage similar to those targeted by this research.

Very recent research (AMP 2009) is supportive of our contention, in framing sites for the current research, that diminished health and wellbeing, rather than skills alone, is the major reason why people are not in the labour force. Indeed the disadvantage many men of working age experience as a *consequence* of being out of work is likely to be *causally related* to their unemployment and withdrawal from the workforce. The AMP research concluded that one half of working age Australians in poor health *are not able* to participate in the labour force.

This research was also framed in a way that seeks to answer questions about men's adult and vocational learning in Western Australia that census data and enrolment data on VET participation cannot. It builds on findings about benefits of community-based learning from research into men in socially disadvantaged and geographically isolated areas (Golding, Harvey and Echter 2005). It was also informed by Australian research into learning by men with low skills and negative attitudes towards learning and training who are involved as volunteers in fire brigades (Hayes, Golding and Harvey 2004) and as participants in community-based men's sheds (Golding, Brown Foley, Harvey and Gleeson 2007).

It also adds to the knowledge of links between the benefits of learning and men's sense of wellbeing (Stanwick, Ong & Karmel 2006), including their health, employment and fatherhood. The research is innovative in that it enabled us to 'hear' what men have to say about their experiences of active engagement in 'safe' spaces and voluntary organisations, often but not always with other men. By collecting data in different regions in Western Australia with higher than average levels of social disadvantage, we are able to identify factors (such as access to education and training, access to computers, remoteness, age discrimination in employment, sickness and disability, caring and family roles) as well as health and wellbeing that can and do make men vocationally redundant and reluctant to learn, and that can be addressed by ACE, VET and family-friendly government policies (HREOC 2007) as well as health and wellbeing policies.

The inclusion of health and wellbeing in educational studies has been a relatively recent trend. Field (2009, p.14) identified 'good reasons for considering well-being to be among the most important outcomes of adult learning'. Field concluded that apart from the importance of wellbeing for the wider community and the learners themselves, 'well-being is also associated with better

health, higher levels of social and civil engagement and greater resilience in the face of external crises' (p.14). This conclusion is supported by recent findings in Australia (AMP 2009, p.2) that 'more than half of working age Australians who [self-report] poor health are not participating in the labour force, while just under a third are in full-time employment.' The same study found that 'poor health appears to have a greater impact on labour force participation as people get older' (p.11). Indeed in Australia in 2007 three quarters of men (and women) age 55 to 64 years and suffering poor health are not in the labour force (AMP 2009, p.11).

Because average income and labour market participation are also closely linked to education levels there has been a tendency for government policies to assume that early withdrawal of older people from the full time, paid work can and should be addressed directly by vocational retraining. The AMP (2009, p.27) study concluded that even in the recent economic boom years in Australia (2001-2007), average earnings of people 'with "persistent poor health" continued to diminish over time irrespective of gender, education and the area people lived in', and surmised that 'such individuals may be among the segment of the population hardest hit by the current economic downturn.' Our previous research, some of it through men's sheds, has shown that many men not in full time work actually withdrew from work for very good health reasons. Often withdrawal from the workforce was related to physical or psychological damage associated with previous work. In such cases, more formal learning about work may not be what men need first and foremost in order to safeguard their health and wellbeing and the wellbeing of their families. What men we studied wanted to learn most about was, unsurprisingly, to learn how to stay fit and healthy.

The research is consistent with international developments through OECD (2001, p.66) that identify all learning environments as important for adults. Kearns (2006) reviewed international experience with equity in adult learning and concluded that equity objectives will be best achieved by integrating social and economic objectives with a focus on the adult learner rather than on vocational objectives alone. Access Economics (2005, p.22) provided evidence that Australia lags in best practice on participation at all mature age cohorts above 25 years. Given other evidence of men's lack of participation in both VET (Lattimore 2007) and adult and community education in age cohorts over 45 years, there are particularly good social and economic arguments for raising participation by men in adult learning generally in the context of an aging population, particularly for those Australian men unable to work, for whatever good reason. As Schuller, Hammond and Preston (2004, p.192) concluded, 'Huge costs are incurred where learning is absent, including poor physical and psychological health, malfunctioning families and communities lacking in social cohesion'. Schuller, Hammond and Preston (2004, p.192) also concluded that 'Learning outcomes should be assessed within a framework which goes beyond the acquisition of qualifications and includes the learner's capacity to sustain themselves across a range of domains.' The learning opportunities examined in this research through men's community involvement are seen as important pathways to many domains which include but go well beyond paid work and which should be consistent with Western Australian government education and employment policies in the sense that they are socially inclusive, economically rational and promote gender equity.

Importantly, our emphasis in this research on the vocational centrality of place in communities and of learning and wellbeing community in settings picks up de Carteret's (2008, p.504) suggestion that 'It is timely to explore informal learning in community settings other than those understood as having an educational dimension.' Mulligan et al. (2006, p.9) argue that we need a much more sophisticated understanding of the changing nature of contemporary community life including a greater emphasis on the experience of participants. As Ouane (2009), Director of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning succinctly put it in the lead up to the Sixth International Conference on Lifelong Learning in Belem, Brazil,

Beyond formal, compulsory schooling, we need education to learn to play our different roles in life with ease and understanding. Attaining technical skills tends to be the most valued, because it has to do with making a living – learning and earning – but more than ever we know this is not enough. We are not merely producers and consumers. We are citizens with family and personal lives.

Methodology

Sampling frame

The main selection criterion was regions in Western Australia with a higher than average proportion of men not in the paid workforce. These regions are, not surprisingly, approximately coincident with regions of lower average socio-economic status as well as with areas where 35-44 year old male inactivity rates are higher than average, as identified by Lattimore (2007, Figures 4.1 and 4.2). Vinson (2007) identified Australian socially disadvantaged locations (postcodes, Statistical Local Areas [SLAs], regions) through existing social and census data. Vinson's (2007) objective and measurable indicators included social distress, health, community safety, economy, education and community engagement.

Four such regions in Western Australia were selected from these selected regions, including inner and outer metropolitan regions near Perth (Fremantle and Kwinana), one regional/rural area (Albany and Denmark) and one remote/very remote area (Carnarvon and Denham) as located in Figure 1 and summarized in Table 1. Cities and/or towns were selected in each region to account also for size, industry and employment profile and accessibility to services (Vinson 2007). This resulted in a total sample of six cities and towns in metropolitan, regional, rural, remote and very remote areas of Western Australia where men are less likely to be in paid work, and much more likely to be socially disadvantaged than average.

Figure 1 Sites included in the research in Western Australia

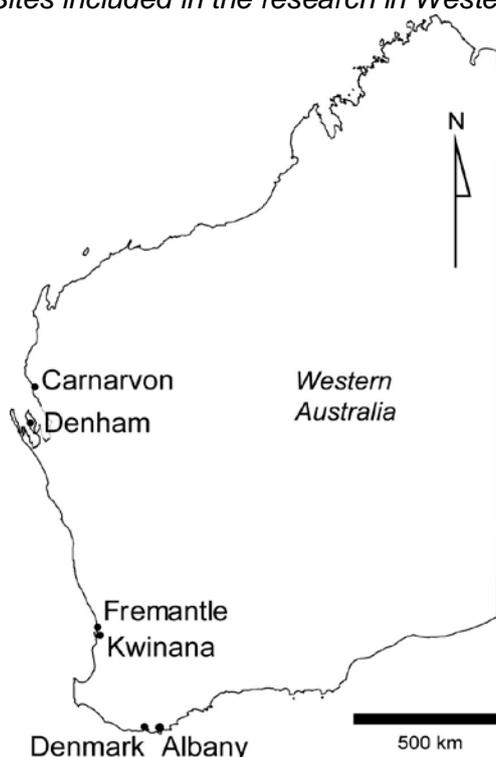


Table 1 Sampling frame for selection of Western Australian regions, cities and towns

Regions	ARIA+	Cities and towns (ARIA+; SEIFA)
<i>Central Perth</i>	Inner metropolitan	Fremantle (0.00; 998)
<i>Southern Perth</i>	Outer metropolitan	Kwinana (0.06; 958)
<i>Great Southern</i>	Regional & rural	Albany (2.7; 984) and Denmark (3.56; 993)
<i>Gascoyne</i>	Remote & very remote	Carnarvon (8.10; 919) and Denham (10.93; 955)

KEY: ARIA+: Accessibility Remoteness Index of Australia; SEIFA: Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas

(ABS Census of Population and Housing 2008).

Organisation types

Focus group interviews took place with up to four informed and consenting men in up to six selected organisations types in each city or town. The selected organisation categories (whose classification is discussed below) were inclusive of men across the community including:

1. adult and community education (ACE)
2. sporting
3. religious, Indigenous and cultural
4. voluntary fire or emergency service
5. age-related and disability
6. men's special interest organisations

Field methods

The benefit of working through community organisations is that they provided a means of ethical access to men – both in and out of work - who had not necessarily had recent education and training experience, and who could be invited to participate in surveys and interviews. The interviews required University of Ballarat research ethical approvals. All survey respondents and interviewees were fully informed and actively consenting participants in voluntary organisations. The invitation to participate included a Plain Language Statement (Appendix 3) and Statement of Informed Consent (Appendix 4) and was extended to male adults of any age, not at school.

The method produced around 18.5 hours of rich, fully transcribed interview data (297 pages) from 38 organisations and more than 100 men, as well as participant survey data from 187 men and organisation survey data from 35 organisations. This number of surveys was sufficient to undertake sub-group analysis of participants including using tests of significance. The transcript data were analysed for key themes and by groups allowing for rich understanding and accounts of men's experiences with learning in different organisations and contexts.

The method required two separate site visits by researchers, involving a total of at least two days in each town or city. The first site visit was preceded by reconnaissance via phone calls, the internet, letters and emails, mostly with prospective organisations. The method to be employed for recruiting, interviewing and surveying was discussed and finalized in an on-site reconnaissance visit that typically involved meetings and discussions with organisation representatives and some potential interviewees. The second data collection site visit (typically a few weeks later) involved participant focus group interviews and surveys, as well as an organisation survey. The surveys were modeled on items and techniques successfully used by the research team in previous research but were adapted to address the new research questions. The methodological detail for these previous studies is available in Golding, Brown, Foley, Harvey & Gleeson (2007) report and supporting documents.

The participant and organisation survey instruments and protocols

The participant survey instrument (with results added as a percentage of all respondents) is included as Appendix 1. It focused on men's experiences of participating in the organisation, attitudes towards and experiences of learning and perceived outcomes from participating. The organisation survey instrument (with results added as a percentage of all organisations) is included as Appendix 2. It sought to explore a diverse range of key characteristics of the organisations included in the study, including the nature of the organisation, a profile of participants, its location, layout, facilities, activities, funding, resources and relationships.

Our decision in the participant survey to explore men's knowledge of the closest '*community organisation where adults can go to learn things*' (in Question 7) was deliberately and carefully worded. We avoided the terms researchers tend to use such as ACE (adult and community education and VET (vocational education and training) since in many Western Australian communities those terms and the associated organisations were either not present or unlikely to be

locally used or commonly understood. We framed this adult learning organisation survey question (Number 7) to get an idea about how men (other than those already undertaking an adult and community education program) felt about hypothetically accessing learning (as distinct from education) through that organisation. In reality, men who answered the question may have been thinking about different organisations and sectors, particularly in cities where there was more learner organisation choice, but also in small towns such as Denmark where there were several learning organisations that might have fitted the generic 'adult learning organisation' description.

The interviewer brought sixteen participant surveys to each organisation, with the header customised for each particular organisation plus reply paid envelopes (see Appendix 1). One survey was given to each of the men who undertook the interview, who was invited to complete and return the survey afterwards. The person who set up the interviews was offered the balance of the surveys but was encouraged to only take the number that could realistically be distributed and returned by men who participated in that organisation.

The person who set up the interview completed a separate and different organisation survey about characteristics of the organisation. The results of this organisation survey have been added to original survey template in Appendix 2.

The recruitment of interviewees (ideally 3-4 in one interview) was organised by a known and trusted informant in each community organisation. The interviews typically took place at the organisation or in another place familiar to the participants. Interviews were audio recorded, typically for approximately 30 minutes. All interviewees were fully informed and had previously consented to the audio-recorded interview by signing the Statement of Informed Consent (Appendix 3). Each participant took away a one page Plain Language Statement about the project that included research ethics and researcher contact details. Interview questions applied to men as active participants in a particular community organisation.

Focus group interview schedule and protocols

The interviews followed a semi-structured format based around an exploration of the following research questions.

1. Tell me about this organisation and what you do when you come here?
2. What benefits do you get out of participating in the activities associated with this organisation?
3. Do any of these benefits flow on to others, such as to your families, work and communities? Tell me about those benefits?
4. What do you learn through coming here and participating in these activities? Give some examples.
5. What advice would you give to similar organisations in order to attract, involve and benefit men?

Classification and selection of organisations

The apparently simple, predetermined classification of particular organisations into the six ideal types from above was more difficult in practice. This section includes an explanation of some of the difficulties involved in objectively selecting organisations for study and achieving a balanced or representative survey sample through informants and organisation participants with busy lives.

In the case of adult and community education (ACE) organisations, it was difficult in large regional cities such as Albany and Carnarvon to identify community owned and managed adult and community education as a separate form of provision as recognized in many western countries, and as found in some (but not all) other Australian states. In these cases, non-vocational access programs provided in TAFE colleges (Technical and Further Education) such as those found in Carnarvon and Albany were identified as the closest equivalents. While Learning Centre Link (LCL) works with a network of adult and community education-type providers, its reach is far from universal across Western Australia, and as LCL (2003) showed, many of its centres are geared

mainly towards women. For example the main LCL-affiliated adult and community education provider in Albany had too few men as clients or volunteers to participate in the study.

It is important to observe that as a consequence, large regional cities such as Albany and Carnarvon, despite having large and significantly disadvantaged sub-populations, are effectively without non-vocational, community-oriented, adult education provision. Almost counter-intuitively, many very small and remote towns in Western Australia (such as Denham) qualify, by virtue of their small population size and remoteness, for a five day a week telecentre service (albeit without programs).

Sporting organisations were much more numerous, diverse and relatively easy to identify in all sites. The main difficulty, particularly in the larger cities, was deciding which organisations to approach and to include in the study. As a consequence of a relatively large number of returns from two bowling clubs in the Kwinana and Fremantle sites (around 60% of the total sport sample), the sporting organisation survey results are skewed towards older bowling club members⁴.

The most diverse, and therefore the potentially least coherent organisation category was the 'religious, Indigenous or cultural' group. All sites (except Denham) had multiple churches to choose from. Similarly, there was a wide choice of Aboriginal organisations in Carnarvon though in Denmark there was none. In two sites the Aboriginal informant was unable or unwilling to participate in the planned interview, highlighting other research experience of understandable Aboriginal wariness of overzealous and sometimes superficial research, researchers, their diverse agendas and lack of proper consultation. The most difficult organisations to confidently categorize into this predetermined 'religious, Indigenous or cultural' category were organisations including Denmark Arts and Denmark Environment Centre. By virtue of the fact that high survey response rates were achieved from the three Denmark organisations included in this group, a disproportionate (40) percentage of all survey responses in the 'religious, Indigenous or cultural' organisation category are from this relatively well-educated, environmentally and culturally rich sub-sample of respondents from Denmark.

The age-related component of the 'age and disability' group was relatively easy to identify through organisations in all sites, though in several sites (and exclusively in Denham), provision of programs for men was through the Silver Chain organisation. While seven per cent of all informants across groups reported a disability, only one (intellectual) disability-specific organisation in Albany was included in our study. Relatively few volunteers were able to ethically participate or respond to the survey by virtue of their disability. For this reason 90 per cent of the achieved, relatively, small sample (n=20) for this age and disability group were from age-related organisations.

Volunteer fire and emergency service organisations are ubiquitous in all parts of populated Australia away from capital cities. Western Australia is no exception. Unlike in most other states, the responsible authority in Western Australia, FESA (Fire and Emergency Service Authority) has tended to collocate these services though many small rural fire brigades have only fire fighting capability. Given Western Australia's extensive coasts and swimming beaches, and that all study sites were on the coastal fringe, the Western Australian sample also included sea rescue and surf lifesaving organisations.

The final group, 'men's special interest organisations' was created to be inclusive of organisations catering only or almost exclusively for men of all ages. Such organisations were present in all sites except Denham. While community men's sheds were in the planning stages⁵ in several locations

⁴ To illustrate the difficulties of balancing this and other samples and achieving the relatively high overall, response rates even with considerable on-site reconnaissance and preparation, it is important to record that three Australian rules football teams were to be included in the study. In one case (Denmark) the key informant was gored by a bull prior to the interview (though the interview did take place with other club participants)! In another case (Carnarvon) the key informant had to fly to Perth on the day of the interviews that were cancelled at short notice. In another case (Albany) only the informant arrived for the interview. Mainly as a consequence, of the 18 surveys distributed to football club participants, only one survey was returned complete.

⁵ The general selection criterion was for organisations that had been active for at least 12 months.

only one such shed in Fremantle was included in the achieved sample. An all male, maritime-oriented shed in Albany, men from a craft-based woodturners group in Denmark (that also admitted women), men from a Returned Services League (RSL comprising, war veterans) and a Masonic Lodge in Carnarvon were included in this very diverse group.

It is important to note that while an attempt was made to secure a sample which included at least one of the six organisation types in each of six sites, in two sites (Fremantle and Denham) one organisation type ('Indigenous religious or cultural' and 'Men's Special interest' respectively) was not sampled. By contrast the opportunity to select from a rich diversity of active organisations in both Denmark and Albany led to nine and seven organisations being sampled respectively, rather than six.

Results

A profile of adult learning in the communities

Formal opportunities for adults to learn in the six diverse sites are closely related to accessibility and remoteness (ARIA+). The larger cities have the biggest range of accessible and publicly facilitated education and training services and programs and infrastructure on TAFE and university campuses. The smallest and least accessible centres have relatively limited learning opportunities and ICT (information and communications technology) through state supported Telecentres. This section briefly summarises the adult learning options (including non-formal and informal opportunities) available in each site with particular reference to options available for men. The sites have been ordered from lowest to highest remoteness / highest to lowest accessibility (increasing ARIA+).

Fremantle (ARIA+ 0.00; population approx 25,000)

Fremantle is the beautifully located, historic port city in Western Australia, 17 kilometres from Perth, the state capital, at the mouth of the Swan River on Australia's western coast. The city is named after Captain Charles Fremantle, the English naval officer who had claimed possession of Western Australia and who established a camp at the site. The city contains well-preserved 19th-century buildings and other heritage features.

Fremantle is home to the University of Notre Dame, a privately run Catholic university with a well-equipped campus in central Fremantle. The university's focus is on the education and training of young people for entry to the major professions: medicine, law, teaching, nursing, accounting and finance, physiotherapy, counselling, health sciences and the priesthood. In addition to the university, Challenger TAFE is centrally located and delivers traineeships, apprenticeships, Indigenous studies, literacy and numeracy classes plus a wide range of other training opportunities. Fremantle also has a wide range of adult education programs running through local community centres across the greater Fremantle area along with a well organized and thriving men's shed program located in White Gum Valley, a Fremantle suburb along with several health and wellbeing programs for disadvantaged and or homeless adults for the Fremantle community, The most notable of these is St Patrick's Community Support Centre, located in central Fremantle which provides support and education programs through a partnership arrangement with Challenger TAFE.

Kwinana (ARIA+ 0.06); population approx. 25,000

Kwinana is located 40 km to the south of Perth CBD, slightly inland, but within the coastal City of Rockingham. Kwinana was established about 50 years ago as home to the workers that were employed in the local petrochemical industry. While some still work in the local industry, the freeway and railway link make it easy for residents to commute to jobs in the centre of Perth. Kwinana is located in a space on the outer edge of the urban sprawl yet between ocean, and bushland. Some people in Perth might occasionally head towards Kwinana to attend the local motor racing and drag racing complex.

Of all six locations in this Western Australian study, Kwinana has the lowest Index of Education and Occupation (EDUOCC=896) from ABS (2008) statistics, ranked the seventh lowest area in the State. EDUOCC summarises variables in terms of the people in an area who are unemployed, their level of qualification and if employed, the type of jobs they are employed in. This low EDUOCC score indicates that the Kwinana area has a lower proportion of people who are well educated, employed in professional occupations, proportionately more unemployed people and more people in low skilled jobs (Adhikari 2006).

Albany (ARIA+ 2.7; population approx 40,000)

The city and historic port of Albany (population approximately 40,000) lies on a picturesque, granite flanked harbour and coastline 402 km south west of Perth in the Great Southern Region of Western Australia. In addition to the large, main campus of Great Southern TAFE that delivers vocational education and training, apprenticeships and adult education the city has a very large number and extremely wide range of community-based organisations. The University of Western Australia offers the first years of a variety of undergraduate courses in Albany.

Despite the Great Southern Region having been identified as having significantly lower adult education participation and more men's health and wellbeing problems than the Western Australian average (Deverell 2006), Albany appears to have no public adult learning facility other than the TAFE that offers non-university programs targeted generally to adult men. The only Learning Centre Link provider in Albany has no men's programs and very few men involved in their women's and family-oriented centre. What services are available in Albany for men tend to be available through specialist agencies. As in many rural and remote areas in WA, Albany has an active Home and Community Care (HACC) program offered through the *Silver Chain* organisation. Albany also has a large and active disability-specific support and employment organisation, *Activ*, and a Men's Resource Centre.

Denmark (ARIA+ 3.56; population approx 2,500)

Denmark is a small rural town on the Wilson Inlet and Denmark River mouth on the South Coast highway 54 km west of Albany and 426km SW from Perth. Its tourism promotion slogan 'Where the forest meets the sea,' alludes to its position on the spectacular, mainly forested, southern Australian coastline. The peaceful rural beauty of Denmark township and area attracts a significant number of visitors and sea/tree-changers. The adult learning options include a small TAFE campus and agricultural college and a very active Telecentre. Denmark supports a disproportionately large number and very diverse range of community-based organisations including arts and environment organisations, consistent with the relatively well-educated retirees and alternative lifestyleers that the area has attracted as new residents and tourism-related business owners. This is in addition to the usual range of community sporting and special interest organisations typical of small rural towns.

Carnarvon (ARIA+ 8.10; population approx 9,000)

The town of Carnarvon is south of the estuary of the (seasonal and usually sandy) Gascoyne River on the North West Coastal Highway 904 km north of Perth. Carnarvon positions itself to its mainly pass-through tourists as 'tropical oasis' and 'year round holiday destination' by virtue of its typically warm, sunny weather, its small area of intensive horticulture (including bananas and tropical fruits) on the lower Gascoyne River and its sheltered port on an otherwise arid, west facing Indian Ocean coast. It is one of the few places on the Western Australian coast where the central desert reaches the sea.

Central West TAFE has a moderate sized campus at Carnarvon while its main campus is at the next closest larger population centre, the City of Geraldton 480km south. Carnarvon has a significant Aboriginal population and the TAFE includes an Indigenous Training Services arm. Carnarvon lacks a general adult education centre and has no programs or service specifically for adult education beyond TAFE including for men. Public internet access (other than through

accommodation or commercial computer outlets) for locals appears to be through the City of Carnarvon Library or to visitors through Carnarvon Visitor Centre. The library internet service (provided by the City of Carnarvon) is specifically for library 'customers' and 'to enhance the Library's research capabilities'. It is very expensive for a public use facility, costing \$1.00 per ten minutes and does not allow for most of the contemporary, essential public ICT requirements including word processing, use of other programs or CD use. Games, chat sessions and downloading files are strictly prohibited. Any local adult wanting, for example, to prepare a resume to apply for a job would not be able to do so, and certainly get no public assistance.

The very limited resources for second chance education in Carnarvon are in contrast to its relative socio-economic disadvantage, indicated by its low SEIFA (Socio-Economic Index for Areas) of 919. On this Index it is the most relatively disadvantaged area in this Western Australian study, and 18th poorest in the State.

Denham (ARIA+ 10.93; population approx 600)

Though only 120 km 'as the crow' flies south of Carnarvon, the location of Denham on the Peron Peninsula puts it a much further 331 km by road south from Carnarvon. Being small and very remote it is located 130 km by road west of the North West Coastal Highway on very arid, windy but picturesque coast. Denham is the service and administrative town for the Shire of Shark Bay that includes the even smaller (but better known) tourist precinct of Monkey Mia with its visiting dolphins 23km north east of the Denham. Being at the heart of the Shark Bay World Heritage Area the town supports a number of tourism-related businesses that are mainly active in Australia's southern winter and has attracted a significant number of locals and older retirees with a passion for fishing.

Being remote and small the town is entitled to the services (though without education and training related programs) of the government funded, full-time *Shark Bay Telecentre* that counter-intuitively provides better public internet access than is available in Albany or Carnarvon, that are around 66 and 15 times bigger respectively. For its very small size, the town supports a large number of (more than 25) community-based organisations, the equivalent of around one for every 25 residents. Sporting organisations including bowls, golf, speedway and pistol club are very active and important in the social life of the local community.

A profile of participating community organisations

Table 2 summarizes the characteristics of organisations that were sampled by survey and interview by site and organisational type.

Table 2 Achieved survey sample by organisation type

Type	<i>URBAN Fremantle</i>	<i>URBAN Kwinana</i>	<i>REGIONAL Albany</i>	<i>RURAL Denmark</i>	<i>REMOTE Carnarvon</i>	<i>V REMOTE Denham</i>	Totals
<i>ACE</i>	2	1	1	1	1	1	7
<i>Sport</i>	1	1	2	1	1	1	7
<i>IRC</i>		1	1	3	1	1	7
<i>Age/Dis</i>	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
<i>FES</i>		1	1	2	1	1	6
<i>Men's</i>	1	1	1	1	1		5
ALL	5	6	7	9	6	5	38*

Key: ACE = Adult and community education; IRC= Indigenous, religious, cultural; Age/Dis = Age-related or disability; FES= Fire or emergency services; Men's= men's special interest organisations.

Table 3 provides a summary of the organisations survey results based on returns from the 38 organisations (36 of which had surveys returned, and 32 of which had interviews conducted that were fully transcribed). Some 'average' characteristics of these very diverse community-based organisations are noteworthy. Several of these characteristics explode the myths that community organisations are necessarily stand alone, insular, free to participants or independent of governments and funding. Indeed 44 per cent of all organisations we researched mainly received

their funding from governments and in 71 per cent participants paid to take part in particular activities. Less than one half (43%) of organisations regarded the overall future of the organisation as 'very secure'.

Most organisations had been operating for many years (median 35 years), around two thirds (63%) were involved in charity or voluntary activities beyond the organisation's main purpose and only 37 per cent restricted the use of facilities to members only. While most organisations (64%) relied to some extent on volunteer staff, one third (33%) relied on some full time paid staff and 42 per cent relied on some paid part time staff. While 40 per cent of organisations categorized themselves as 'totally funded', one quarter (26%) were 'partially funded' and 34 per cent saw themselves as 'underfunded'. Around one third of organisations (32%) shared their facilities with another organisation and most had outside affiliations: including state (78%), regional (59%), local (53%), national (47%) or international (19%) affiliations.

The services and facilities these organisations provide are diverse and significant. The organisations, facilities, programs or services are, on average, open all year round (71% of organisations) and available for more than 80 per cent of all week days and more than half of weekends. Organisation meetings between members or participants typically happen either monthly (51%) or weekly (37%). While 71 per cent of organisations are available 'for a specific interest group' a lesser proportion (59%) assessed the eligibility to become a member against a criteria. Importantly in this study of men's participation, no organisation in our study catered 'only for men' and only one in ten organisations (9%) were 'mainly for men'.

A profile of organisation participants and their survey responses

The participant survey summarised in Table 3 by site and organisation type achieved an overall response rate of 54% (187 respondents) from 36 diverse organisations in six sites.

Table 3 Achieved responses (number & per cent) by organisation type and site

Type	<i>URBAN Fremantle</i>	<i>URBAN Kwinana</i>	<i>REGIONAL Albany</i>	<i>RURAL Denmark</i>	<i>REMOTE Carnarvon</i>	<i>V REMOTE Denham</i>	Totals Response
ACE	14/32	3/16	2/5	4/12	1/5	3/3	27/73 37%
Sport	7/16	10/16	2	4/19	3/3	5/5	29/49 59%
IRC		11/16	2/3	12/16	1/1	2/4	20/57 35%
Age/Dis	1/16	6/16	2/2	5/7	4/7	2/9	20/57 35%
FES		3/8	14/16	14/15	7/7	2/5	42/51 78%
Men's	13/16	8/16	8/14	10/11	4/6		43/63 68%
Totals Response	35/80 44%	41/88 47%	32/59 54%	45/64 70%	19/29 59%	14/26 54%	187/346 54%

Key: ACE = Adult and community education; IRC= Indigenous, religious, cultural; Age/Dis = Age-related or disability; FES= Fire or emergency services; Men's= men's special interest organisations; fractions represent number of surveys returned over the total number distributed (less those returned blank). Response is this fraction as a percentage.

The response rate is such that the responses can be seen as an approximate indication of participant attitude but cannot be seen as fully representative of all organisation members. Because many of the organisation contacts were relatively active, literate office bearers in the organisations as well as participants in the surveys and interviews, the achieved sample is likely to be skewed towards relatively educated, older men (only 11% of respondents were less than 40 years of age and 42% had completed Year 12 at school). Most (85%) of the men surveyed identified as 'active participants' in their organisations. Nearly one half held 'a leadership role' within the organisation and two thirds had been active in the organisation for more than two years.

Using the data from Australian accessibility remoteness (ARIA+) classifications for the six sites, approximately equal proportions of respondents were from major cities (41% of respondents, in greater Perth) or an outer region (41%, Great Southern region) with about one in five from a remote/very remote region (18%, Gascoyne region).

Returns were received from each of the six organisation types (ACE; sport; Indigenous, religious, cultural; age-related and disability; fire and emergency services; men's and special interest). The

smallest number of returns (and smallest proportion, 11% of the total sample) was 20 from the 'age-related and disability' group. The largest number of returns (and biggest proportion of the total sample) was from the 'men's and special interest' and 'fire and emergency services' group: (42 returns: 23% and 40 returns: 22% respectively of the total returns).

The responses to each question are not discussed in detail here, but have been added to the original survey instrument as a percentage of all valid responses to all questions and sub-questions in Appendix 1. This sub-section summarises important, overall findings from the participant survey.

Firstly most respondents were very positive about their experiences in the organisation. Two thirds participated either a few times a week or weekly. They particularly and most enjoyed being involved 'when they wanted to'. They also recognized the critical importance of organisational leadership. Respondents were very positive also about most of the outcomes 'as a result of participating', most notably 'doing what they really enjoyed' and 'giving back to the community'. They were least in agreement about 'expecting to get more paid work' (83% total disagreement) or 'getting access to men's health information' (44% total disagreement) as a result of participating. Men overwhelmingly viewed the community organisation in which they were surveyed as a place to give back to the community, meet new friends and learn new skills. Three quarters of men agreed that the organisation is a place that 'keeps them healthy' and 'to be with other men'. Two thirds of men saw it as a place to 'get them out of the house'.

Being mainly older men more than 80 per cent of men were married or previously married and/or with children and three quarters still lived with a wife or partner. While eight out of ten 'were satisfied with life generally', in the past five years life had thrown up a number significant changes for a significant minority of men in the same interval. One quarter had experienced retirement or a 'significant loss' in their lives. One in five had experienced 'a major health crisis'. Around one in eight had experienced depression, difficulties with their business or job, a financial crisis. a new personal relationship, a new impairment or disability, separation from a partner or separation from children. By contrast, and consistent with prevailing labour force statistics during the previous boom years, only one in 20 men had experienced unemployment.

While only adult and community education and fire organisations typically incorporated formal learning or training, more than half of participants recognized opportunities for learning hobby or leisure skills through the organisation and more than four out of ten recognized opportunities through their organisations for learning team or leadership skills, safety or health skills or communication or literacy skills. Many of these skills, and particularly health skills or communication or literacy skills were seen to transfer usefully to home, work or the community.

Learning by participating was perceived very favourably. More than nine out of ten participants agreed that they were keen to learn more, would like to improve their skills and that 'being part of the organisation' helped them to learn. More than half agreed that their 'organisation should offer more opportunities for learning' and one half of participants agreed that they were hypothetically interested in participating in such further learning. Importantly, a further 43 per cent left open the possibility of participating with a 'maybe' and only seven percent registered an outright 'no' to further learning opportunities through the organisation.

Men expressed a wide interest in a range of preferred learning styles *within* their organisation, with an overall strong preference for hands on learning within the organisation from a fellow organisation member or an outsider 'brought in'.

Asked about their *general* learning preferences, and given wide, multiple choices, more than 95 per cent of men agreed that they enjoyed learning 'in practical situations' and 'by doing', or 'in a mixed group including women'. Nevertheless 55 per cent of men also agreed that they also generally enjoyed to learn in a group with men'. Interestingly, while computer mediated learning has made recent rapid inroads, one half of men disagreed that they enjoy to learn 'via the computer or internet'.

Men's attitudes towards the local adult learning organisation were very mixed. Over 80 per cent agreed that it was 'held in high regard by the local community' and 'would use it anytime if they really needed to'. However more than one quarter 'would not feel comfortable going there'. While around three quarters of men saw it as 'a useful place for them to do courses', only around one quarter of all men had attended a formal learning program in the past year (from other cross table analyses, shown to be mainly men in adult and community education and fire and emergency service organisations).

Men were asked to identify possible learning impediments. The strongest agreement was very pragmatic: they would be more likely to be involved in learning 'if there was something they really wanted to know'. Six out of ten men identified the importance of having programs or courses available at times that suited them. Importantly, a similar proportion (62%) of men were effectively unable to identify 'somewhere locally they considered a good place to learn'. Gendered learning issues were present for a significant minority of men; nearly four out of ten would be more likely to learn 'if there were more learning situations where men were encouraged', though only one in five saw the local availability of more male teachers or tutors as an issue. Four out of ten men saw their age itself as a learning impediment and one quarter identified either their health status, their confidence, the length of courses or proximity to their organisation as an impediment.

Participant perceptions of learning by organisation

1. On a wide range of criteria, *fire and emergency service* organisation participants reported the most positive learning experiences and attitudes towards future learning. Fire and emergency service volunteers were significantly more likely than all other organisation participants to be in paid work (72% were in paid work compared to 43% overall), with a wider range of relatively young ages, with high levels of recently completed formal training and involvement in the organisation. Six out of ten men involved in fire or emergency service organisations would seek further learning opportunities through the organisation. A relatively high proportion - around two thirds - were interested in undertaking a course to get a qualification, with a very high preference for hands on learning and a recognition of considerable opportunities to improve their communication skills. This category of organisation, by virtue of its exceptionally wide spread, long average membership spanning all generations and positive wellbeing outcomes associated with participation identified below, is regarded, on the basis of these results, as pivotal in future attempts to engage adult men in learning in Western Australia.

2. *Age and disability* organisation participants were, on average, least interested of all group participants in anything other than the social aspects of learning. Participation was typically regular and weekly. Positive interest in more learning was relatively low (around one quarter were interested though the highest proportion of all groups (63%) said 'maybe'). They were very positive about undertaking future learning through the same organisation. They were also the most interested group in the local learning organisation as a potentially valuable resource to them as well as a useful place for them to do courses.

3. *Adult and community education* participants were most expectant of all groups of getting more paid work as a result of participating. As with fire and emergency service workers, they were very positive that their communication skills had improved as a consequence. They were the keenest group to learn more. They were much more likely to be positive than other participants that the organisation's small size made learning easier. They also were most in agreement that opportunities to learn elsewhere in the community were limited and were most positive that further learning should be through the same organisation. They were also most likely of all groups to be positive about mixed gender, classroom based or computer mediated learning. Unlike other groups and consistent with the fact that many men involved in adult and community education were enrolled learners as a consequence of unemployment rather than as organisation members, the time men had been associated with the adult and community education organisation was relatively short: two thirds had been associated with the organisation for less than five years.

4. Men participating in *sporting organisations* were much more likely than other groups to be former tradesmen (seven out of ten were) and around one half had completed apprenticeships.

They participated more frequently than other groups (54% participated several times a week) and more than half had been involved for between five and nineteen years. Along with fire volunteers, they were least likely to know enough about the local adult education organisation to use it.

5. The diverse group of men participating in *Indigenous, religious cultural* organisations were most positive about their organisation offering more opportunities for learning, particularly via special interest courses in small groups. They expressed relatively positive experiences at school (one half reported that they 'really enjoyed learning at school') and were much more interested than other participants in learning on their own from books and written materials. Of particular interest is that a very high proportion (72%) had a degree of higher as their highest post-school qualification, a factor linked earlier in the report to the likelihood of skewed Denmark sub-sample.

6. The similarly diverse group of men participating in *men's special interest* organisations were most positive about being able to participate in their organisation when they wanted to. They were more likely than other men to recognize that difficulties with their skills made it hard for them to learn. Unsurprisingly, they were more likely than other groups to want to be with other men and their groups were much more likely only to welcome men. They were least likely to feel comfortable about going the local adult learning organisation, least likely to recognize it offering anything they need to learn but most likely to go there if more men they knew went there. Their strong learning preference is for practical situations in groups with other men. They identified more significant barriers to learning than any other group, including lack of free time, restricted opening times and few available male tutors. The lowest proportion (six out of ten) had completed Year 10 or less at school.

Participant perceptions of wellbeing outcomes by organisation

Apart from perceptions of learning outlined by participant group above, it is possible, specifically for the fire and emergency services and age-related and disability group participants, to glean (below) a number of conclusions from the survey about participant wellbeing outcomes perceived as a consequence of their participation. For all other groups, wellbeing outcomes as a consequence of participation did not differ from the average outcomes for all men.

1. On a wide range of criteria, *fire and emergency service* organisations also provided the most positive wellbeing outcomes associated with participation. Participants were much more likely to currently be in paid work and express the highest levels of satisfaction with life generally. They were most likely of all participants to regard the organisation as a place to learn new skills, to keep themselves healthy and give back to the community. As a result of participating they were significantly more likely to really enjoy what they are doing, feel like they belonged in the organisation, improve their confidence and feel happier at home. While most volunteers were men, they were much more likely than men in other organisations to feel positive about participating in multi-age groups as well as with women. Finally but importantly, fire and emergency service volunteers recognised the highest level of links with and beyond the local community, itself indicative of high levels of social capital. The positive wellbeing outcomes associated with participation by men in these organisations are remarkable and significant.

2. *Age and disability related* organisation participants, being significantly older (one half were over 70) were primarily on income support (80% were on a pension) and benefited more than other participants from the social outings on set days and times. Of all participants they were more likely to get access to men's health information, meet new friends and enjoy getting out of the house. Being most likely of all groups to be grandfathers (four out of five had grandchildren), many were in a situation to potentially mentor grandchildren. One in four men had experienced either a major health crisis in the past five years or a new impairment or disability. Their satisfaction with life generally (at 85%) was almost on a par with the fire and emergency volunteers, though one in five had experienced depression in the past five years.

3. A high proportion of adult and community education *participants* (three out of ten) had experienced a significant loss in their life, a major health crisis or a new personal relationship in the past five years and nearly half had retired. However few wellbeing outcomes as a consequence of

participation for this adult and community education group differed from the average outcomes for all men.

4. Men participating in *sporting organisations* were much more likely than other groups to be married and still drive a car. However few wellbeing outcomes as a consequence of participation for this sporting organisation group differed from the average outcomes for all men.

5. The diverse *Indigenous, religious cultural* group had been subject to considerable, recent adverse change including unemployment. One in three had recently separated from children, one in four from a partner and one in five from the family home. However few wellbeing outcomes as a consequence of participation for this Indigenous, religious and cultural group differed from the average outcomes for all men.

6. One quarter of the similarly diverse *men's special interest* organisation participants had experienced a financial crisis in the past five years. However few wellbeing outcomes as a consequence of participation for this men's special interest group differed from the average outcomes for all men.

Participant perceptions of learning and wellbeing by employment status

With respect to learning and wellbeing, this research provides a unique opportunity to directly compare the experiences and perceptions of men not in the paid workforce (unemployed or not in the workforce) with men who were in paid work (see cross tabulation in Table 4).

Table 4 Paid workforce and retirement status of survey respondents

I am currently in the paid workforce		I am retired from paid work		
		No	Yes	Total
No	Count	22	82	104
	% within I am currently in the paid workforce	21.2%	78.8%	100.0%
	% within I am retired from paid work	22.4%	95.3%	56.5%
Yes	Count	76	4	80
	% within I am currently in the paid workforce	95.0%	5.0%	100.0%
	% within I am retired from paid work	77.6%	4.7%	43.5%
Total	Count	98	86	184
	% within I am currently in the paid workforce	53.3%	46.7%	100.0%
	% within I am retired from paid work	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

In summary, a similar proportion of men who participated in community organisations were in paid employment (n=80; 43%) as those retired (n=84; 45%), with the balance unemployed (n=23; 12%). The discussion that follows summarizes key differences between these three groups.

Men in paid employment (typically aged between 40 and 70) were the most active organisation participants, much more likely to hold leadership roles and have a say over how the organisation was run than men not in paid employment. They were also more likely to take on a mentoring role and feel comfortable about women participating, though ironically their organisation members were more likely to be men. As a result of participating they are most likely of all three groups to feel like they belong in the organisation and able to give back to the community. Along with retired men, in the past five years most (83%) have experienced general satisfaction with life, though along with unemployed men, men in paid employment are more likely to have experienced difficulties in their businesses or jobs and a new relationship. They are more likely to agree that 'members of their organisation need more opportunities to learn' and more likely to be interested in and actively take

part in the learning opportunities being offered. Their preference is heavily towards 'hands on' learning. Men in paid employment, though typically actively involved in community organisations are much more likely to consider the local adult learning organisation does not offer anything they need to learn. This group of men presents the adult learning sector in Western Australia with both the biggest challenge and the biggest opportunity for vocational learning.

Men who are retired (typically aged between 60 and 80) are more likely to have been married, be fathers and particularly grandfathers and on some type of pension. An unexpectedly high proportion of men (one half) had completed Year 12. As with unemployed men, in the past five years a high proportion (around one quarter) had experienced a major health crisis. A relatively small proportion: only one in three are definitely interested in more learning opportunities through the organisation though six out of ten said 'maybe'. Retired men were understandably more likely to identify age and their health as reasons not to be involved as learners. This group of men presents the adult learning sector in Western Australia with a relatively low opportunity for vocational learning but a large and growing opportunity for other forms of lifelong learning including through ACE.

Unemployed men experience a very difficult combination of circumstances quite apart from being unemployed. They also benefit most from community involvement. They are much more likely to get access to men's health information as a result of participating, feel better about themselves, feel happier at home and sense that their literacy skills, confidence, social and organisational skills and wellbeing have improved as a consequence of participating. They are more likely to regard the community organisations they participate in as places to meet new friends, get out of the house, learn new skills and keep them healthy. Only around one half of these men had married or currently lived with a wife or partner and only two thirds had access to a car: nearly one in five therefore relied on others to get to the organisation and nearly half were dependent on some type of pension. In the past five years a higher proportion had experienced a wide range of adverse circumstances, and as a consequence had experienced much less 'satisfaction with life generally'. Amongst the more difficult circumstances, one in four had experienced depression, a financial crisis or a significant loss in their life in that same interval. Around one quarter had experienced difficulties with a business or job, a new impairment or disability, separation with a partner or a major health crisis. These groups of learners and potential learners are arguably poorly served by learning organisational models and programs in Western Australia, which serve up vocational programs without the many other forms of learning, friendship and social support, or adult and community education programs that cater primarily for women.

Impact of age on learning and wellbeing

The relatively small number of respondents in all age classes of less than 40 years and more than 80 years is insufficient to make valid comparisons with these age cohorts. This brief general summary is based on comparable data available for the range 40-80 years. At the higher age ranges, men who left school very early, by contemporary standards (at Year 10 or earlier), comprised around one half of participants. Toward the older end of this range where the likelihood of retirement from paid work is higher, men share many similar perceptions and experiences of life and learning. Older men particularly enjoy the social aspect of learning if the environment is homely. Older men typically report having less say over how the organisation is run and fewer chances to mentor others. They are more likely to regard the organisation they participate in as a place to keep them healthy. Older men are much more likely, in the past five years, to have experienced a major health crisis, a new impairment or disability. However with less likelihood in the same interval of having experienced difficulties at work, in unemployment, a business or with their finances or with personal relationships, they report relatively high rates of 'general satisfaction with life' approaching 90 per cent.

The skills available through older men's organisations are much more about hobby and leisure skills and much less for most other skills. 'Definite interest' in more learning decreases with age but is still at around one third for men into their 80s. What declines - to less than ten per cent - is an interest in courses that lead to qualifications or preparation for further study. Interestingly, preferred learning styles and locations do not change much with age. Older men are more likely to

favourably regard the local learning organisation. The perceived barriers to learning, as with retired men have more to do with age, health, proximity and suitable class times rather than with the availability of free time.

Learning narratives from the six organisation types

This section of our report departs from comparisons of the quantitative data generated by the surveys. It look closely at what individuals *within* organisations, seen to be representative or illustrative of the six organisation types, are saying in the focus group interviews about the learning and wellbeing they experience *through and within* the organisation.

We have chosen to write narratives for 12 organisations: one third of all 36 organisations that we have transcribed interview data for, including at least one organisation in each site and organisation type. For each organisation, summarized in Table 4, we have started with a 'brief picture of the organisation' to introduce the site, establish the context for the interview and to help understand the learning and wellbeing being reported by interviewees. We then look specifically (and usually separately) at the learning and wellbeing being reported, before turning to some of the gender issues identified by men. The 'standing back' section seeks to critically link the learning identified in each organisation to several of the six aspects of communication identified in the Australian Core Skills Framework (personal, cooperative, procedural, technical, systems, public).

Table 4 Learning narratives by organisation type and site

Sites & Types	Adult & community	Sport	Church/ Indigenous	Fire & Emergency	Age-related	Men's special interest	TOTALS
Fremantle*						Men's Shed	1
Kwinana	TAFE	Bowls					2
Albany	TAFE	Speedway	Aboriginal				3
Denmark	Telecentre		Anglican	Surf			3
Carnarvon		'Dash'			Senior Cit	Lodge	3
Denham				VFRS	Silver Ch		2
TOTALS	3	3	2	2	2	2	14

KEY: 'Dash'= Gascoyne Dash; VFRS= Volunteer Fire & Rescue Service; Senior Cit= Senior Citizens; Silver Ch= Silver Chain; Aboriginal= Albany Aboriginal Heritage Reference Group; Audio-recording difficulties limited the available Fremantle data.

Our narrative reporting conventions and limitations

In order to personalise the men's accounts but retain confidentiality we have given the men cited names that are pseudonyms. All organisations selected for these narratives have been consulted to ensure that the text relating to their organisation is factually accurate and appropriate. Most citations are direct quotes from the original interviewee transcripts. Where words have been added by the researchers to improve or clarify meaning they are indicated in square brackets. In some cases sections of text from the same informant that were separated in the interview have been cut and pasted to improve the flow. Where less important material has been deleted (and in some cases, where comments, sentences or phrases were not clear or audible enough for accurate transcription), three dots ('...') have been added. Care has been taken in this process to ensure that the perceived interviewee's meanings and original expressions are retained. Nevertheless the researcher 'voice' that prompted the interviewee comments and that actively guided and 'shaped' the interview both beforehand and during the interview are missing in this account.

Finally, our narratives are only as rich as the interview data contributed through our active interviewing by the participants. Our selection of organisations is perhaps more reflective of the success of the interview for all parties rather than on the success of the particular organisation. In some fascinating organisations, and despite our careful, advance preparation, a range of practical factors conspired 'on the day' against us conducting an interview that could be transcribed or achieving a large enough (or 'representative') sample of interviewees.

Structure of the narratives

For each organisation examined, we have, where appropriate, written under several broad headings: *A brief picture of the organisation, Learning through the organisation, Wellbeing through the organisation, and Men in the organisation.*

For each organisation (or sometimes groups of like organisations) we have added reflective *Standing back* sections. In these sections we do two things. Firstly, we reflect on what the narrative data tell us about the learning opportunities available to men through a convenient and widely recognized Australian theoretical filter: the six aspects of communication identified in the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF). Secondly, we critically examine the opportunities for enhancing health and wellbeing available through a convenient and widely recognized international theoretical filter: the nine World Health Organisation (2003) 'Determinants of Disadvantage' (and some alternative opposites). We return to examine these filters in more detail in the *Discussion* section.

Adult and community education (ACE) organisations

ACE is an acronym: used widely and often loosely in Australia to refer to Adult and Community Education. In Western Australia, as in most other states, the word is not understood by most adults, even those adults who might be learning through a community-based or other 'provider' that is seen as part of the adult and community education sector.

Various described also as further education, access, community education, basic education, literacy and numeracy, adult and community education can be facilitated in a wide variety of settings, but principally those where the intent is about learning but the likely, direct outcome is not vocational. In Western Australia adult and community education tends to be missing other than through TAFE or Learning Centre Link's network of community providers. To illustrate the differences in approach to non-vocational learning, we have selected three providers of non-vocational, access-type types programs in a rural town setting (*Denmark Telecentre*), a regional city TAFE (*Great Southern TAFE, Albany*) and a capital city TAFE campus (*Challenger TAFE, Kwinana*).

Challenger TAFE – Kwinana

Challenger TAFE Institute provides vocational education and training in a large region immediately to the south of Perth. The institute is spread out over some eighteen different campuses of varying sizes from Fremantle to Rockingham and through to Mandurah on the coast, while also reaching inland to Mandijong, Pinjarra and Boddington. Two of the eighteen campuses are located in the industrial suburb of Kwinana, described on the Kwinana Town website⁶ as 'a thriving and expanding community, integral to the industry of Western Australia, yet cushioned by natural bush and set on the Indian Ocean Coastline'.

One campus houses a newly completed, state of the art Automotive Industry Training Centre. This is located on prime real estate on the main access road through Kwinana. At first glance one notices the prefabricated architecture and modern colour scheme of the training centre. The spotless workshop space mirrors what would be found in industry. State of the art equipment is immediately apparent, as are a wide range of hand and power tools. All that seems to be missing is students. Being very new, this facility was only just starting to get established.

The other TAFE campus in Kwinana is much older and located out of the way and off the main road. It also offers the access programs that form the basis of this narrative. This campus looks much more like a traditional, small to medium sized TAFE campus. It has a double storey brick building and a few other buildings of various constructions around and behind the main building. Some of these are little more than sheds. Like most of the other public access establishments in Kwinana, it is located in a natural bush setting. As you approach the campus buildings the graffiti that adorns the campus buildings becomes apparent. Indeed the graffiti marks the campus. To some, like an academic researcher, it may mark down the facility, but to some young working class students it likely says 'this is ours'. These buildings are lived in with the presence of students

⁶ <http://www.kwinana.wa.gov.au/index.asp>, Accessed 16 Sept 2009.

immediately obvious. Visitors are warmly greeted by the group of half a dozen or so smokers who take up a position outside the main entry door.

The interior is laid out with corridors of varying widths and numerous classrooms coming off them. Some of the rooms are multi-purpose with small, light construction, flat tables that are easily re-arranged and comfortable chairs. Many of the rooms have the student tables arranged in a rectangle, so that students can see each other as well as the teacher. Some rooms have computers arranged around the perimeter of the classroom with pairs of students sitting facing the walls, looking at the screens and sharing a computer terminal. Class sizes throughout the campus seem to range from between ten and twenty students. The classes have both men and women in them though there seems to be more women than men, ranging in age from very young to middle age.

Learning and wellbeing through the organisation

The courses being run at this campus that attract men are mostly access type programs that are used to 'kick start' and re-start students into adult education and training at the lower end of the accredited spectrum. One student who was interviewed said that he was doing the Certificate General Education for Adults (CGEA) at Certificate 3 level and another was doing the Certificate 3 in Leadership Development. The latter interviewee explained that

... most of the students I know here are doing Certificate 1, 2 or 3. . . . I did a Cert 3 and am continuing Cert 3 this year. I am doing Leadership and Business Studies.

Another explained that they were learning basic IT skills, reading and writing. Yet another explained how they were in the process of choosing a community project. This project stands as a centrepiece to the community leadership course. They seemed very excited about what this might be, how the community project would unfold for them and the learning opportunities that they anticipated would result from the experience.

One student explained that he only recently moved into the area and didn't know anyone so he thought it was a good idea to go to TAFE. He explained that it was not too taxing, and that he should be able to succeed. He describes attending his TAFE course as 'a good lift' for him.

The cost of the courses is an attraction to these students. One of the interviewees gave an example of this when he explained how they get to do a First Aid certificate as part of their course. He noted that this is heavily subsidised. If you weren't a TAFE student it would cost \$430 but because you are a TAFE student it would cost probably \$75.

There are many motivations evident but the primary stated motivation seems to be about working towards gaining a good job.

Men in the organisation

The male students on this campus appear to be outnumbered by approximately two to one. The students I spoke with explained that they had a team of six lecturers, of which two were men. They appreciated the presence of male staff and one commented that while at school he didn't have a male teacher until Year 9. The interviewees thought that there seemed to be more support available for women struggling in the community than for men.

Great Southern TAFE, Albany

Great Southern TAFE has its very large, main campus in Albany, It was the winner of the 'Large Training Provider of the Year 2008' award in Western Australia. Apart from its extensive vocational programs it offers lower level Certificates in Spoken and Written English and 'Gaining Access to Training & Employment' (GATE) as part of its Access and Equity initiatives. While the Spoken and Written English course was designed in NSW as ...

a bridging qualification for adults from non English speaking backgrounds which further develops your language and literacy skills to undertake further education and training, seek and maintain employment and participate in the community. You will learn skills in speaking, listening, reading and writing.

Many students who undertake such programs in Albany have a lower level of functional or formal literacies for a wide range of reasons *other than* non-English speaking status.

Learning through the organisation

In some states in Australia such as in Western Australia, Tasmania and Queensland, Adult and Community Education, including lower level literacy and numeracy courses tend mainly to be available for men through TAFE, particularly in major regional centres. These courses are typically low on the hierarchy of qualifications and in terms of their direct or perceived vocational relevance.

In regional centres in Western Australia such as Albany and Carnarvon, in the absence of alternative and perhaps more appropriate places for men to go, literacy and numeracy workers in TAFE are confronted by a huge diversity of learners with literacy and numeracy issues. Sometimes they are in large classes coming for very different reasons, perceived problems and anticipated outcomes. What the men who come to these classes have in common is that they desperately need for to someone to hear the pain of living with what others have judged to be their limited formal literacy – despite, in many cases their rich and varied life experience. As 85 year old ‘Stan’ (introduced below) put it, based on his lifetime of experience, “You wouldn’t get a job and you wouldn’t hold a job if they found out”.

In Great Southern TAFE’s main campus in Albany the programs are offered in what the researcher perceived to be very ‘tired’ portable classrooms’ at the back of the campus. Coming directly from research interviews with volunteers in community-based learning contexts to interview TAFE literacy and numeracy students was a huge contrast, necessitating a change also in reporting format for this account. Unlike in the other organisation narratives, we have introduced each student individually.

‘Stan’s’ learning and wellbeing

‘Stan’ was 85 and enrolled in a Certificate 1 in Adult Education as he “couldn’t read and write”. ‘Stan’ was a proud father to six and many times a grandfather and now great grandfather. He had a diverse working life after leaving school before he was twelve, mainly but not solely as a farmer and was ...

... still the farmer, I run my own farm ... I didn’t have a lot of education or bookwork, but now I feel that I need this start in life with education. I run my own business so hopefully I will make better [business] judgement.

Stan anticipated that the Adult Education Certificate 1 course, would ...

... broaden [me] out a bit ... You fill yourself with a bit of knowledge and hopefully ... it [will] improve your lifestyle to have a bit more knowledge. ... You get that information by reading and you can do a bit of research on lots of things and follow up some of the things that you were fazed on all your life.

Stan’s family, including his sister and wife who had covered for his limited formal literacy for much of his adult life, were all very proud and supportive about him coming to TAFE.

I find people supportive. Everyone I come up against more or less says “Congratulations”. ... [My family] watch me go, they don’t urge me to go because I made the decision myself and I have been making it all through life and not following it up. I always put my family first in a way, but I felt my time was wanted there and I have been farming most of my life. I served three years in the 2nd World War. I had my own business landscaping and I always wanted to work for myself and although I worked these other jobs, that was a great springboard for me.

When working for and managing other people he always had to ‘bluff’ that he could read and write to get a job and to keep it. He also bluffed his way through a number of necessary qualifications.

I was a ganger in the State Rivers in Victoria when I was farming and I wanted to leave and they asked me to stay back another year, so I felt that I did the job all right, I was in charge of 20 men. Then I did a ... condensed Veterinary Course for 3 months and I got 85 per cent. I did an oral test and they

knew I couldn't read and write. I had to do the course [at an agricultural college] because, that was a [regulation of being a] soldier settler [on a farm]. I worked on the Shire for 4 years when I was farming, plant operating ... but I bluffed with a lot of things. So as I say "If you let them know what you are doing, you are left behind in the job in five minutes".

'Brian's' learning and wellbeing

'Brian' was 32 and doing a Language, Literacy and Numeracy course at TAFE. Unable to read what his eight year old daughter was reading, Brian also wanted "... to be able to write down things, I can't spell, bummer, if its got more than five letters in it, just forget it." In addition, Brian "had never even used a computer until I came here. A lot of people find that really weird, I had never used the Internet let alone looked at it." Brian has previously found ways to compensate and accommodate. "I have just about learnt everything by doing, by watching everyone do it, I take really good notice because I can't go and read about it."

Work as an industrial spray painter and sandblaster for twelve years had treated Brian's body very unkindly.

I broke out in dermatitis and stuff from all the toxins so I cannot go back to it whatsoever ... so I need to get better skills because I need to get another job which pays at least the same and that's very hard to find. I went and had a look after three years on compensation as to what jobs were around and there's not much more than \$450 a week - I was getting that in a matter of a day.

I thought there was nothing out there apart from spray painting and now I look back and [of] the risks I used to take on a daily basis like doing inside vessels and tankers and stuff and in the hull of the bottom of boat ... and a full-on explosive environment. All it takes is one spark and that's it. You're dead and that was day in and day out. I'm surprised I could not even see the risk and jumped in there with a smile on my face, singing in there and stuff. ... At the end of the day I have seen many of my work mates and that taught me. ... Many of them die of cancer. In the time I was in the industry [for twelve years] four of them went out 'like that.'

Brian had a long-term hope about getting a job but in the short and medium term, it was mostly about ...

... more reading and writing skills to actually keep up with my daughter. She's ... in Year 3 and can read about as good as I can at the moment and she just keeps getting better and faster.

Coming back to TAFE felt...

Pretty spooky. Last time I went to TAFE was back in '96 when I did a traineeship for the sandblasting and spray painting and that was like Certificate 3 and I bluffed and lied and cheated my way through the whole course and I got on really well with the lecturer ... I asked him over a few beers about all the tests 'If you verbally ask me and I verbally tell you questions back, will that pass' and he said 'Not really but I will do it anyway' ... because if I didn't pass all the TAFE stuff then the company that I was working for was going to sack me after the first year.

Brian was making some progress in his third week but was uncertain as to where the course would lead.

I can read a couple of paragraphs and use the spell check [on the computer], which I never even knew existed. ... You can see where your mistakes are ... without someone actually telling you what you have done wrong - you can't change it. I am not sure which way I am really going. As soon as I lost my job I got bad depression and I sold all my assets and that and basically locked it into a bank account until I work out which way I'm going. ... I don't really have a clue what I really want to do. I might acquire some qualifications type of thing. I would like to look at fisheries, officer type of thing or something with [Conservation and Land Management]. I really can't stand being boxed in anywhere, I can't sit down that much either.

Like Stan, Brian was getting support from home and was concerned about not following his mate's work and life trajectories.

I have been with my Mrs for 14 years this year. ... The whole family think it is great {I'm doing this course}. I had nothing to do with my family since they threw me out when I was 15, everywhere I have done it myself. ... I have a few mates who are really jealous, they're shearers and they have bitten off too much than they can carry with mortgages and souped up cars and the whole lot but they are really

jealous because they are my age and their back is already starting to play up and they can't stop because they are going to go down.

'Todd' and 'Corey's' learning and wellbeing

'Todd' and 'Corey' both knew that what they wanted to do required them to demonstrate a higher level of literacy to qualify – for the Army and university respectively. 'Todd' was 21 and doing a Certificate II in English and Certificate III in Maths. He...

.... originally chose this course because I got an apprenticeship in the Navy and I had based my apprenticeship on Yr.10. I originally failed Yr.10 because I mucked about, I actually did Yr.11 and 12 TE and its been a while since I did any Maths or English since I left school so I thought I would come back and revise ... so what I am doing is I have come back to revise to make sure ... that I get into the Navy.

Nineteen year old Corey found Senior High School 'a dump' and left with a particular dislike for one teacher halfway through Year 11 to start (and subsequently dropout of) an IT course. Aspiring now to study anthropology and archaeology at University after major surgery and after being rejected by the Army, he was now referred to and enrolled in Language, Literacy and Numeracy at TAFE.

I did try for the Army but because my English scores were not good, so then I tried for the Uni and that was not good so they ... referred me to this course. So I am trying to do Yr.10, 11 & 12 all in one year so that I can try and get into Uni.

Todd was already 'amazed' at how some of his previous learning had come back and his confidence was growing.

Already I have opened my eyes in a different English aspect, a few of the teachers said that I was a lot more educated than I thought I was and its actually something that I should have focussed on more at school, I couldn't give a stuff. ... I have had these people in the background saying that you have got more than you think you have which has been a big bonus. I will tell you what if I could get back and do what I did 5 years ago I wouldn't do it now, no way ... I would go back and focus properly. I can say that I have learnt a lot since I have been here with the reading, I could hardly read anything, I could read cat and mouse and stuff but that was about it. I can read a little bit more now, not a lot and you always get plenty of assistance in the class and that is encouraging. Knowing that you are with people who want to learn and that is another thing that gives you encouragement ... it gives me encouragement any how. Although a lot of them are further advanced you don't see it as a level, you see it as they want to learn so I want to learn

'Tom's' learning and wellbeing

'Tom', age 48, had been involved in a very serious car rollover, and as a consequence of the accident had an acquired brain injury, walked with a frame, required a wheelchair and had speech and memory impaired. Peter was enrolled in Maths at TAFE by his mother. While his eventual aim was "To learn things I could do. Truck driver, coach driver" he maintained "You don't need to know this if you are a bulldozer driver." He did not use computers and "never wanted to use them." Beyond these comments, much of what Tom said could not be properly understood by the researcher or the transcriber, though he communicated an obvious frustration with trying to be heard and understood by speaking.

Denmark Telecentre

A brief picture of the organisation

The Denmark Telecentre is one of many, State government funded Telecentres across mainly rural Western Australia, which later in 2009 were to be renamed as Community Resource Centres consistent with their widening service and resources functions. In a prime street front location and open five days a week between 10am and 4pm, the Denmark Telecentre services not only include email, internet and video-conferencing services but also included a Centrelink Agency (10am-2pm each weekday) a Westnet Agency and an IT Multimedia and Training Centre.

Learning through the organisation

The most popular courses the Telecentre runs for men, particularly for older men less likely to have 'been born with a mouse in their hands', are computer-related. 'Eric', 72, an ex painter and decorator had been in Denmark for fifteen years, and had completed First and Second 'Click' programs that respectively introduce and deepen adults experiences of using computers. 'Frank' was a 61 year old ex-publican, had been in Denmark less than a year and was gradually "finding little jobs around the town through various contacts that [he had] made."

Eric regarded the Denmark Telecentre as

... a learning place. I had a very limited knowledge of computers when I first came in, being brought up in the Navy where there was no such thing as a computer. I have three sons and they are in their 40s and they are very familiar with computers ... They said "Dad, it would be a good thing for you to learn so we can communicate more" because they live in Perth. So I came along to the Telecentre and found out that there are various programs which are Government-funded and are basically free, which for a pensioner is something to consider So I enrolled for the first course and found it very informative. I have been a little slow [as a] learner but I enrolled for a second course, then I started to learn a lot more.

The 1st Click program is basically a [six week] introduction to computers, where virtually from the very beginning they show you how to switch on your computer and to access the various programs and files up to receiving an e-mail and sending an e-mail. Each teacher has got a different style of teaching and some you can get a good rapport with, the others tends to stick pretty much to the curriculum. It's very, very informative and I must admit it is an enjoyable thing to come along here, plus the fact that you can access it outside of the normal classes. You can come in, being an actual member of the Tele Centre which only costs you \$10 per year, you can get two free hours. It's excellent.

Eric acknowledged many learning benefits of instant communication.

I have learnt a new means for communication. The one thing about computers is they're instant, the information is there instantly whereas before if I wanted information I would come down to our local library here and you would have to get out the appropriate book and find the appropriate subject you want to cover ... you would read it and then write that in long hand on a piece of paper and take it home. Today we come in to the Telecentre and you have access to whatever subjects you want, you can print that information out by the computer and then its there. ... The thing that I have learnt is instant communication. Previously if I was writing to my brother or sister in England or my sister-in-law in America (a) you would phone but that was very expensive or (b) sit down and write a letter ... and writing a letter to America or England you're probably ten days before you can get a reply, that is if they instantly reply to you. Whereas today I can send off an e-mail to my sister and I can get it back within minutes. Learning to me is trying to keep up with technology today and the technology we have got here is almost freely available and I am so pleased I have learnt how to use it, some of it anyway.

Frank, being younger and quite new to the town,

... discovered that [the Telecentre] had all sorts of services [and] most of it is free ... faxing, computers, Internet, look up e-mails etc. etc. Then I saw the courses were available and being fairly computer illiterate I decided to join up for a course and again because the hours were very convenient, late afternoon into the early evening it was very convenient for myself. There were about 4 or 5 people on the course and a nice social occasion plus also a nice learning experience ... although I knew a few bits and pieces that Barney pointed out on the 1st Click course and he helped me get more confidence to operate computers. The 2nd Click ... showed us into the different programs and provided us with a CD provided by the WA Government with all the different programs on it which I found very, very useful. It has been a great experience and because it's free and because it's funded it is a fantastic service.

Frank's learning was primarily ...

Social learning. ... [The Telecentre is] a nice place to walk into. I think because of the people who operate it. [The two staff] are both nice folk: very, very friendly and as soon as you walk in you are made to feel welcome which is a fantastic thing. So I am learning that Denmark is a very good place.

Wellbeing through the organisation

Eric acknowledged great wellbeing benefits from his enhanced computer communication ability that particularly includes email and internet.

I can now e-mail my three sons, ... brother and two sisters, they're in England and I can now communicate with them. ... Sending e-mails back and forth is very convenient, plus I can attach so

much more data that I hadn't been able to do before. I have a sister-in-law in America and we now communicate frequently and we send photographs backwards and forward and this is a benefit that I have found basically through the Tele Centre. ... Even if I had been paying for the course its more than worth it. ... The other thing I have got through the Tele Centre is that I have met many people and we can send e-mails just around the town. Although it is a small town ... it is still very convenient if you want some information. I can text one of my friends and it will come back 'This is the information you wanted Eric'. ... The Internet for me is virtually an encyclopaedia. Any information I want is available on Google and sometimes it's just that one word ... will bring you up millions of information.

Eric elaborated on the many benefits of improved internet access.

The year before last we went [on holiday] to America and a place I had never been to was Alaska. I wanted to find out some information about hotels and the basic climate and it's just a matter of clicking on 'Alaska' and all this information came up. I was able to read a great deal about the places we were visiting before we went there. Even if I wanted to open a book on tours and tourism which I didn't do because we were actually on a guided tour. I am particularly interested in the Civil War in America so this year we are going to Gettysburg. It's wonderful to me. It has virtually opened up a complete new facet ... at my age. It is just a field that I have never been in before because I have always been working and didn't have the time.

Frank also benefited in many ways from the improved internet access.

Holidays is one thing. We are planning to go on our wedding anniversary next month and we are looking to visit the back street towns of WA and they're coming up on the Internet ... So all of those one-horse towns with hotels and things. I do quite a bit of photography. I use quite a few photographic websites ... You put the word 'Horticulture' in and you get the Latin name and up it comes. that's fantastic. Communication is always the big thing. ... I am always looking for little business ideas, so I just type the word of something I think about doing - and then up it comes. ... It's a fantastic idea for people in remote places to stay in contact and feel part of the real world and although you come here to escape the hustle and bustle it's nice to actually know that you are only a click away from a major centre somewhere.

Frank got much more out of involvement in 1st Click.

Being an outsider and knowing absolutely nobody in town, I knew one person in town through a joint friend. It was nice to come down here and meet other people of similar age with similar ideas just trying to improve their knowledge. It was nice to come here and interact with other people in the town. You feel a little bit like a fish out of water when you come into a brand new place so it was nice to have that relaxing type of experience and that people didn't have two heads and didn't bite. ... I talked my wife into coming down and doing the course, again more for the social side of it because she's fairly computer literate and she did pick up points that she didn't know before. I find that I am very much more confident now when I sit down in front of a keyboard and a screen and my wife has found a couple of new programs that she didn't realise were around.

Men in the organisation

Some Telecentres, like the one Denmark have actively sought out prospective learners from across the community. They have also found innovative ways to successfully involve men, who make up approximately half of the learners in the computer access programs.

Standing back

The five men we interviewed in the Access programs at the TAFE in Albany are illustrative of the huge diversity of lower level TAFE participants, that the research shows have either zero or negative outcomes from Certificate I and II courses. One of the students (Brian) summed it up neatly when he observed the commitment of teachers and the enormity of the task of coping in a class with the acute and different literacy and numeracy needs of these five men.

The teachers they have here are really marvellous, they single you out and try to help where they can and they have got a hard job because they have got everyone on a different level doing the subjects and that makes it hard for them too.

Not only are these four men at different literacy levels, the learning they need to achieve their diverse goals are also so very different. The literacy is an important first step: the different literacy and numeracy courses they are doing will not in themselves change their vocational or life situation. Stan has already endured a lifetime of bluffing about his illiteracy. Brian will find it very

hard to find a job as well paid as the one that damaged his health and potentially his life. Todd's is valiantly attempting to make up for 'stuffing around at school' five years ago. Tom's is struggling with the loss of literacy through acquired brain injury.

Challenger TAFE and Great Southern TAFE provide critically important, local opportunities for men from very diverse backgrounds to pick 'up where they left off' in terms of their formal literacies and numeracies in 'access' programs. Most men involved in such programs in TAFE, particularly younger men, realized that they had to make the new start somewhere and in terms of affordability, there were few local alternatives. As we completed our report in late 2009 we heard back that the Kwinana campus we studied ...

... will be closing down at the end of this year - the building is owned by the local council who wish to regain its use for their own purposes. so all the existing programs will be dispersed far and wide across other Challenger sites - not really a good thing: The men in the area will lose something that quite a few have come to lean upon for extended periods of time. Indeed the whole Kwinana community seems to use the campus a fair bit, because of its emphasis on Access programs. I'm not sure the new Auto centre can fill that need.

The Denmark Telecentre by contrast tends to attract and involve older men in programs where their needs are more specifically related to using the internet for leisure and lifestyle purposes and where the learning tends to be discretionary.

Men's participation in adult and community education-type providers such as through Telecentres and in TAFE access programs ('typically down the back' of TAFE) in Western Australia involves relatively low levels of ongoing involvement and engagement in the providers themselves. There appears to be relatively few opportunities for ongoing involvement as volunteers in the organisations. Men certainly get opportunities to develop and practice some aspects of communication such as those described within the Australian Core Skills Framework. Through participation in computer and literacy 'access' programs, they get opportunities to restore and renew identities as learners and gain some new core skills damaged by a combination of difficult early lives, changes in workplaces and recent life events and changes. There appears to be relatively few opportunities for men to communicate in groups and in the organisations or to interact with their wider communities.

Men are positively embraced by all three organisations in ways that partly address men's wellbeing consistent with a small subset of the World Health Organisation determinants of disadvantage. The programs, if not the organisations, are nevertheless inclusive of older men and produce opportunities for further study. The extent to which meaningful employment, productive work and other wellbeing outcomes are achieved through participation in these providers is much less certain.

Sporting organisations

Sporting organisations are so diverse that we have selected several very different organisation narratives as illustrations of that diversity. We have chosen one sporting organisation from three regions: the *Albany Speedway*, the *Gascoyne Dash* an annual event run by the Carnarvon Off Road Motorbike Club and the *Kwinana Bowling Club*.

A wide range of community organisations oriented around motorised machines is attractive to and actively participated in and patronised mainly by men in Australia. They include organisations specializing in stationary engines, cars, motorbikes and trains preservation, display and racing. Two such organisations are subject to analysis in this section to illustrate their learning and wellbeing roles: the *Albany Speedway* and the *Gascoyne Dash*.

The Albany Speedway

A brief picture of the organisation

The Weekender in Albany (October 30, 2008, p.77) reported that 'Albany Speedway season blasts off' with plenty of new cars and faces at Atwell Park. It has not always been that organized, as a Speedway club's Life Member recalled.

The club was formed back in the late 60s by a group of blokes who got together and started racing at an old rubbish dump and then progressed to Denmark down on the Ocean Beach sand and then they got more organised at the end of 60s and organised the Speedway where it is today. From there, from just a gravel track carved out into the side of the hill it has developed into a first class venue. The track, the pits area, the main clubrooms and canteen are all new facilities. The track has lighting, so we run at night now and that draws more competitors and more spectators. We normally have between ten and twelve meetings a year and between two and three weeks apart. This year we had a National title, the modified productions ... that's at Easter and we also run various features during the year ... sedans, productions, juniors ...

For the uninitiated (as the interviewer/researcher was), there is some necessary but brief technical detail. The modified production cars are

... well-modified suspension wise and motor wise. ... They are set anti-clockwise so the suspension is set up to go around left corners only ... The engine can't be bored or 'stroked': most of the components have had to be of saloon-car type component state of manufacture.

By contrast, stock cars

... go both directions and the car has to be very well balanced so you can't set it for a direction which makes it a bit more challenging. ... As you come onto the track you go left or right, anti clockwise or clockwise. The pits marshal flips a coin as they are ready to leave. They have no idea, until they get out the gate.

Also for the uninitiated, none of this comes cheap to potential competitors. For the cheapest (100cc) division, "... to get a good condition, basic one you would be looking at about \$5,000. Sprint cars would cost around \$10,000 a week to run. Super saloon you would be looking around \$100,000."

Learning and wellbeing through the organisation

In order for a speedway race meeting to safely start, a huge amount of learning has taken place by very skilled and highly responsible volunteers. Most of it is learned by doing and by progressively taking on and earning responsibility, though some of it is vocational and accredited.

On a typical race day scrutineers go around before every race meeting to check all the cars are up to specification. The stewards (including a deputy) maintain control of the competitors. In one steward's words, they

... keep the blokes in line and help run the meeting. They actually start and stop the race and wave the chequered flag at the end or - if a car crashes - they control it. ... Apex are [paid] to do the gate. We have bar personnel who run the bar and people who run the canteen.

All the bar and canteen staff have safe serving of alcohol and food handling certificates. Apart from a timekeeper,

Upstairs you have got two commentators and scorers, time keepers ... on the infield you have fire crew [and] St Johns Ambulance. We have a tow truck crew. A 'push ute' or two [for starting open wheel sprinters]. They all have to be there for it to operate, because if one section fails and it falls over, then the event doesn't happen.

For some drivers, the learning benefits are significant but mostly mechanical, such as learning "...car loads, setting up suspension, ... how you get more reliability and more power out of [the cars]".

One of the drivers (an earthmoving contractor in his day job) summarized the personal benefits of competing at the speedway.

Adrenalin rush, social interaction and I hope it keeps away the onset of Alzheimer's ... I enjoy the younger people and the camaraderie afterwards. ... I like making people laugh so that all goes hand in hand with them getting involved in the club. It's what they like.

The interviewer/researcher sought more detail.

It's the thrill of the run, like driving on the edge, a lot of it is really close racing and that's part of the fun of why you do it ... it's to see if you can keep your position where you start or gain a position to get past cars without hitting them. It's part of the challenge. On occasions you might get a trophy.

For some older, experienced drivers such as the following 52 year old, it is about fathers who are mechanics mentoring sons and informally passing on mechanical skills as well as socializing.

I have been a mechanic for 35 years and since becoming involved in the Speedway and through the cars I have learnt a lot about suspensions, how they handle, what happens when you get a job, being a scrutineer and some of the things people do to cheat which is not one of the good parts. By participating in the club I am supporting my [nineteen year old] son for racing. That's why I am involved in the club, so it's supporting him ... I have a lot of other friends there too. ... I have got [an automotive] workshop and [he's] also doing an apprenticeship so there is a relationship that way. It certainly makes it easier to race and the fact that we can do all the repairs on the mechanical side.

His son confirmed that "I get a bonus with a race and I enjoy working on cars. I am an apprentice mechanic and the Speedway has helped me into that area."

A volunteer who helped out in the bar explained what he had learned other than the job itself.

I have done a bar manager's course ... and that's something that I would never have done if I hadn't been involved in the Speedway. Just in helping out you learn what different people are like, how to handle some people and that's quite entertaining sometimes, how to get involved in groups.

A driver and helper explained that he had learned to mix more widely, socially and through work. and to tolerate a wider range of people.

You tolerate all natures of people who come together for the one sport. You learn to work with people of all different natures of work and attitudes of all sorts and that helps you because you are mixing ... You don't always get a chance to meet with that many different people in one location ... I find that is good, the social part of it, just to learn to work with other people ... and to get jobs done ... and all the different ways you can go about it, all the different angles with the people you have to work with. That's a big thing, it's quite good, because working for myself you are stuck with your customers that you are working with all the time.

While there is an element of controlled risk associated with the thrill of speedway racing, some drivers recognize the support of family – in this case, of a wife and mother. "They come out and watch and are a support factor I guess ... they are always pretty stressed about hoping you don't hurt yourself when you do have a bit of a bingle."

Some of the benefits to participants are related to promoting and supporting their own businesses. For example a powder coater explained that ...

I have my own business powder coating and through the Speedway there are some benefits ... Sprint cars are probably the main things we do. Their chassis [of] the formula 100s and the formula 500s are powder coated, just to make them look pretty. ... So that is a benefit that my business gets from that ... And it's sponsorship as far as components [go] for the cars, it's good to see your name out and about on some of the cars.

A speedway steward without the money required to race explained the multiple wellbeing benefits and enjoyment of being in a responsible position trackside with cars racing 'straight underneath' him. He also explains clearly how he was motivated and learned to be a trackside steward.

I have always enjoyed car racing probably more so than football ... You get interested with the cars, you look at cars racing, you see what is happening, you understand what happens to the car when they are doing different things ... I have never been able to afford to race so I have never had that opportunity ... so you go there and you watch ... those silly buggers going around and hurting themselves ... They provide the entertainment and you're getting entertained. I have been back here in Albany for eleven years now and coming to the Albany Speedway. I used to park my chair up in front of the canteen there and I sat down and watched. And you have these people in the tower there at the start line and they were doing their job - and after awhile you start learning things and you're seeing things and there were things that weren't quite right ... decisions weren't getting made properly ... In the end there was one bloke standing in the tower by himself. Now if anyone can see that it *really* needs two people to do that job and they only had one person - so silly me put my hand up ... So now I have been placed on the edge of the track.

Quizzed further about how he learned to make quick and responsible judgements, the steward elaborated.

You have to anticipate ... I thought I used to be pretty good at that when I was in trackside. You could anticipate when accidents were going to happen, you can see it happening ... When you become a

steward then all of a sudden you have to look at *everything* and you have to know everything straight away - which puts a lot of pressure on you and when you have to make a decision and a judgement on something that happens in a split second and you have to come up with that information ... now before I used to be able to do that fairly easily, you can see that happening and you pre-empt it sometimes its hard. You have to learn what is your job and you have to be on the ball 100 per cent of the time ... Sitting there as a spectator is easy. People make mistakes and you wonder why do they make [them], but [when] you are actually responsible, that's it !... Once the responsibility goes on your shoulders it's a different kettle of fish.

A Speedway Club Life member recollected on what he had learned.

[I've] learned not to be upset by what people say or by people's criticism ... you learn the technical side of things and the unpredictability of the sport ... People say its boring and it goes around in a loop and that's all they do. But every time, just about every race, the track is different.

For the Albany public, the benefits are about night-time entertainment (including some 'prangs') for all ages and both genders.

... [I]t's the only night-time motor sport in Albany and its beneficial and it gives them somewhere to go, a social outing. We could get 600-800 people [on a quiet night] and up to 3,000-4,000 people [other nights], depending what's on. If it includes the sprint cars we have had 4,500 people. ... It ranges from young kids up to granddads.

Men in the organisation

While it is mainly men involved in the front line of the organisation and as competitors, women play important, other roles. It is not only men that are involved as participants, as a steward elaborated.

There are women there as well - they are participants [too]. But I reckon the Speedway is fairly well oriented because you might get one partner racing and the other partner is there in the pits or they are doing something around the track ... You are working somewhere or involved somewhere where there are spectators and they enjoy it just as much as the people on the track. You will normally find that you have got the competitors but the partners and wives are actually helping to run the event, they might be in the canteen, they might be scoring, timekeeping and they actually help make it go ... So you have got the competitors and you have got their partners helping too. It's a club, and being a club it takes people to make it work, without people it won't work, so they have to get the spectators in there and they have to be able to have the people on the track doing the entertainment.

[But it's] mostly blokes that race. There are women that race, but there would probably be an equal number of women and blokes who come and watch ... There are couples and families that all come out and watch. A lot of people go to see the prangs. They like to see hard, fast racing, not to see the cars damaged, but it's quite spectacular to see some of the rollovers and when they hit the fence.

The Gascoyne Dash

A brief picture of the organisation

The Gascoyne Dash is an annual, off-road race over a weekend through a remote area east of Carnarvon that in 2009 involved 25 car drivers and 128 motorbike riders from across Western Australia and interstate. The event takes a significant amount of complex management and coordination over the previous twelve months by a volunteer committee and event manager. The event has its own highly professional website that in 2009 experienced 60,000 hits in the six months leading up to the event. 'The Dash' as some participants call it, requires significant input in terms of time and expertise from a large number of local volunteers, businesses and other voluntary community organisations

Learning and wellbeing through the organisation

The learning involved for the organisation of the Gascoyne Dash's volunteer core group, comprising four to five men, a committee of ten and approximately 150 men and women directly involved is significant. It involves liaison with competitors, landholders and sponsors as well as what the event manager called

... all the crap that you do post an event. It has developed into a twelve months a year job. ... I suspect it's something different. It's not like being involved with the end of town soccer. You're getting a view of

a country and a group of people both involved in the event and parts of the event ... the land holders, sponsors, businesses involved, there's an excellent cross-section.

The event web site, including the move in 2009 to a fully on-line event entry process, is increasingly important to the event's success and typically takes a lot of learning, work, proficiencies, training and assessment 'behind the scenes'.

One of the huge things in terms of people is physically managing all the data that is provided by the competitors ... You want to have all the particulars ... and that typically all comes on the forms with the data entry ... This year we have moved to a fully on-line process which is virtually a back room where they load up the details. ... It is significant for the club's ability to have a more efficient website and that will be one of those proficiencies and it will reduce the load on volunteers too because there is an enormous amount of data entry and paperwork leading up to the event that there is always a problem ... This year (2009) we are completely overloaded, we ran short of volunteers. The website will be absolutely imperative in the long term to get that up and running for events like this.

The key organizers, when asked about what they learn, initially and playfully acknowledged only that "It's bloody hot in that river bed!" The Committee Chair more seriously proceeded to explain how much learning was involved with diverse volunteers, some of which involved risk management training issues for and with volunteers.

On the organising side of things, with your own committee, you have to work with them ... You have people coming from different backgrounds, so in a short period of time you have to work them out ... I used to do it in footy in the old days. You can't treat one player like you treat another player, so you have to be reactive in a way.... You have to try and evaluate ... on the run of what's going on and make decisions. Everyone is a volunteer so it's quite difficult to apply real business principles ... We have some outcomes which are not negotiable, there's certain safety aspects. [Sometimes we] sit down and performance manage a person who has done a less than satisfactory job.

The event's race director concluded.

I guess we have learnt to get better at organising [volunteers] and to provide more infrastructure for them in order to get the job done and we have actually identified that we need more volunteers to get the job done ... Probably the biggest problem is trying to drag those extra volunteers in.

The risk management strategy is very specific, elaborate and involves much formal learning, recording of competencies and testing as well as a check of competencies in a mock run. The race director stressed that

There is that specific training [for volunteers] and they have to go through an accreditation process and a test. ... They physically go out on the spot and they have got all the gear there and there is a 25 question test in the terms of safety expectations ... They are signed off on that and the information is retained for insurance purposes, so that if they had an accident and had been told that they weren't allowed to wear thongs ... that is all in the documentation. Above that you have got different levels of officials. We operate under the auspices of Motor Cycling Australia, and they have their accreditation instruction for their officials ... [Several of the organisers] have done the hands-on modules so outside of going to a State or National event we are probably as high up the accreditation tree ... as possible. ... Similarly most of their modules and training is on line so you can go in and get all the relevant material and answer the questions and you're done. You have a logbook so they keep track of what you have done so that experiences are recorded.

The post-event evaluation process is similarly rigorous and actively involves volunteers.

When the event is finished in terms of improvement we get feedback in a number of areas ... from our people through a debrief. ... Like everything, everybody and his dog wants to give their two bobs worth. We have a series of debriefs to find out from the people on the ground, the coalface. I guess that is part of the volunteer process that is pretty important, to get that feedback. No matter how well it works it is obviously important for them to attend meetings and stand up and contribute.

The main organising committee have strong links through their diverse professions to the local business community and most of them got involved initially as event participants, but their reasons for giving much of their time and effort to this event are part out of a sense of community obligation to the community and part about making the most of the remote location. As the club chairman said, "Given the town is a little bit remote, I think you have to get involved in the community activities, otherwise you go stir crazy."

The event and organisation started organically as a one-off fundraiser but with both fun and purpose, as the race director explained.

In 1995 we had a major flood here and there was a lot of ... property damage ... plantations were washed out and there was all sorts of disaster about the place and at the time I was at the Apex Club and I knew a lot of people around town and I organised a 'wet run' down river and we raised money for flood relief. At that time the Government was doing a dollar for dollar contribution for anyone who raised money for flood relief. We ended up raising \$14,000 and we got another \$14,000 out of the State Government towards local flood relief and it was something to do. ... But then the river didn't run for about five years and by then we were getting a bit frustrated. Then in 2000 we had a major flood ... so we got another group together and did a major powerboat run from Gascoyne Junction to town ... another fundraiser. That time we actually donated to the hospital here which bought an emergency trailer for them. We wanted to do something and have some fun but also have some purpose in it.

As it transformed from one-off fun to a semi-regular public event it required new skills and lateral thinking, as the race director detailed.

One of the problems with events like this is that you need insurance. So the first one we did under the service clubs under their insurance and virtually we were all involved and all knew each other and were able to pull the strings to do it. The second one we did under the auspices of the Variety Club so we used their insurance and pulled the second one off. Of course you have got major issues, insurance and litigation these days. Then the river didn't flow again for some time and so we came up with "Why don't we do a dry run?" A group of [blokes] got together and ... formed a club who were interested in the idea and the concept and we did the first dry run from Gascoyne Junction to Rocky Pool and that was really successful and raised quite a bit of money - and it has just grown from there. ... As it's grown it has snowballed and dragged in more people and everybody who has come along has wanted to become involved in it.

The wellbeing outcomes, apart from the unique motor sports 'buzz', extend to a wide range of community organisations involved. As the race director explained,

The organisations external to the club are the Lions Club, YCS Sisters, Rotary Sisters, and the School of the Air Sisters. ... We pay them a small amount for their services. To them its probably a large amount: it's one of their major fund raisers in the year. I guess the benefit to them, particularly the ones that camp out, they sort of make it into a fellowship arrangement for other clubs to get together for an evening or a weekend each year, and especially the guys involved like Rotary and YCS - they all get a buzz out of it. Again its probably the motorbikes they see and some of the gear they see and certain motor vehicles they will never see on the road because it's unsafe ... it's just an atmosphere that I guess you only get with motor sports, not with other sports.

The benefits are also experienced personally as a sense of fun and satisfaction. One of the committee explained that the volunteers ...

... get a big buzz out of being involved in something, particularly the ones around the event time ... My old man for instance went out and laid the stop/go sign on a desolate little road track in the middle of nowhere. He got out there with my cousin and they just stayed there for 5 or 6 hours and he was stoked. He had great fun. ... There are several other pensioners who have nothing to do with the event all year who have gone and got accreditation from road crossing attendants. ... It gives them a feeling of worth and purpose and they feel important ... it gives them something to aim for and strive for and they're proud of it.

The considerable inputs and commitments from local businesses and business owners (mainly men) are significant with some deliberate economic flow ons for the region but that are not without their problems, as the club president elaborated.

Every business has something that's attributed to [the] Gascoyne [Dash]. Maybe they're wearing our T-shirts that week or they have a display in the business ... We need to continually push that economic benefit to the region and to this town ... restaurants, motels etc. hence the flow-on, the Woolworth's, the fuel, there would probably be tow trucks around. There wouldn't be too many people around who weren't actually selling something Those businesses are pretty valuable as a resource to our event, so it tends to drag on them a bit and it has been quite a strain on a lot of guys in the club, that monetary drain and the workload just to get it all happening.

The Gascoyne Dash is somewhat unusual in terms of its use and increasing dependence of modern management and business techniques and its dependence on the internet to engage and involve much of the Carnarvon community. As one of the organizers said,

The Gascoyne Dash [has] the largest portion per population of volunteers involved in any one event anywhere in the country ... I don't think I have seen as much support from any other community for an event as brilliant.

The event has, in some senses been too successful for the size of the committee organising it and for the pool of committed volunteers available. The organizers acknowledge ...

... the enormous amount of work that a small community has pulled off to have what we have now – from what we started with, to the huge amount of infrastructure and assets that we now have. The idea was to build the event to a self-sustainable point and for the last few years we have been working towards that. Unfortunately the event is building quicker than what we can build to save itself. ... These kind of things tend to have a win and then all the volunteers fall off and the event falls over. We didn't want that to happen and we think it is a lot bigger and better than that, so we drove it to sustainability ... Unfortunately, I think it has actually caught up with us and actually over-burst: its popularity has actually overtaken our ability to keep up. You get trapped. We need more people. We are locked in because we have committed ourselves to it and we have got people falling off the side. It does make it difficult with something like this and I don't know what the answer is.

Men in the organisation

While the committee and all but a handful of the 150 competitors are men, the committee acknowledge that a number of female partners, 'particularly those with time on their hands' are 'maybe begrudgingly' interested. Effectively, women play a key role in the event but it is not 'always roses' domestically about the extent of the commitment required for men involved and their partners or children.

It puts a lot of pressure on family relations, probably because we over commit. We decide that The Dash needs to happen, and regardless of whatever else is going on around, it is going to happen - and we get on with the job, unfortunately as blokes do, that does become a pain in the arse in relationships and wives and everything else and they do get cranky with it. We have had to pull out of the red a few times.

One of the organizers noted that these sorts of events...

...seem to be men dominated, and particularly in the sports sector. The culture is that women are quite happy to take a backward role. There are dozens of women behind it. ... They are obviously cooler under pressure than males tend to be ... They probably understand the social run of events and the men want to know the trucks.

Kwinana Bowling Club

The Kwinana Bowling Club is a beautifully presented bowling facility with four greens and a large indoor social room. The history of the club invokes proud memories of fundraising through barbeques, beer and bowling for those who have been involved for some time. The club was started in its current location about 30 years ago after breaking away from a shared facility with the Kwinana Golf Club. After being given the land by the council, members of the club banded together and through their efforts cleared the land and built the current facilities 'from the ground up'. At the outset, the club members raised \$20,000 and borrowed another \$60,000 for the initial building program, which was fully repaid in ten years. Some eight years ago the club made the decision to convert to synthetic greens and to put in lights for night games. These greens require a high outlay but have lower running costs. To put in these new greens cost the club some \$300,000. The club borrowed funds for these developments and they are well on the way to having this paid back.

While at times the club has employed greenkeepers and bar staff, voluntary unpaid work continues to be at the heart of this club. As part of the need to remain economically viable, all the work is done voluntarily from fundraising and green keeping, through to office and bar work and cleaning. Many of the members are retired from paid work and have learnt to bowl as part of this stage of their lives. Some spend up to 20 hours a week down at the club: one member tells of having missed only five games of pennant in fifteen years.

Learning and wellbeing through the organisation

Most members come down to play bowls and socialise. The interviewees spoke about companionship. They come to enjoy themselves, catch up and often to do some sort of work. As well as learning and practicing their bowling, members from very diverse backgrounds talk of learning social skills, patience and tolerance. One person called this 'learning through other people'.

Also to a certain extent it teaches you to become a little bit more tolerant, have more patience, and sometimes a little bit more persuasive. So it's interesting.

One interviewee spoke about after retiring he found himself following his wife around the house until she suggested that he go to the club and take up bowls. Since then she has also joined. Another spoke of losing his wife to illness, of being alone and the important role that the club has since played in his life. For some, membership of the bowling team, or of responsibilities at the club give them a reason to get up in the morning.

Those interviewed were clearly able to recognise that they were involved in ongoing learning and development. As one stated,

It's an ongoing thing; I think you learn something every day when you are doing any sort of voluntary work. There's always something comes up that you haven't experienced before.

They also spoke about learning in association with the upkeep of the greens. One man spoke about learning to use the fungicides in the most effective way and of solving problems that arose from the new synthetic greens. They told of the challenge of learning to run the bar, of dealing with different people and of using and balancing the till. Another spoke of the similarities and differences between taking on roles and responsibilities in running the club and his previous experience of coordinating and supervising workers on building sites.

I have been a supervisor at work a fair bit so I guess that has helped a little bit. ... It's a bit different being President to being a supervisor at work because you have certain things to do and you can guide people the right way, but down here you have got different people from all aspects of life and they have all got different qualities, different ways that they want to run the place and you have to try and ... Yes, compromise. I guess that's the word.

Men in the organisation

Bowls was seen as 'a leveller' where perceived hierarchies of status can dissolve. As one interviewee noted,

We have been away to Geraldton and all different areas playing bowls and you meet people and it's a real leveling thing. It doesn't matter whether you're playing with a High Court Judge or playing with some other type of person, we are all on first names and we're all equal on the bowling green.

When asked about offering advice to others about attracting men to an organisation, it was suggested that men need to ...

become what I would call good club members and not have a selfish agenda, they have to look at the organisation or the club as a whole and see if they can fit in and help or assist in all the better ... and if they are picked to play in a team and they don't particularly want to play in they should remember they play for the club and not specifically for themselves or the other three guys that they were playing with. I think that's the thing to me that is pretty important for anybody who wants to join anything like this.

Another man suggested there was a need to 'put in'. This was summed up as 'not to fear to do too much'. Another important piece of advice was that as a sporting activity, bowls was not strenuous and could be played at many levels. One of the interviewees spoke about bowls as an inclusive activity: ...

... a sport that people who have a disability or asthma or that sort of thing they can come and participate [in] very easily. You don't have to be a fully fit type of person to play bowls and in that way they have an outlet that they can join in with people in the community, they can learn. I guess younger guys who can't play football and cricket because they have some sort of a handicap. I'm mainly talking about asthma because I'm an asthmatic ... if they come and play bowls its not that strenuous that they can't play it again, and that way they have somewhere where they can join in and play the game ... join in.

Standing back

The three sporting organisation narratives describe very different types of sports, with quite different patterns of engagement, participant involvement, learning and wellbeing.

The Albany Speedway organisation's focus is on running a safe and successful public event. The organization provides rich and ongoing opportunities for men and women of all age, to learn, practice and develop all aspects of communication contained within the Australian Core Skills Framework. There are opportunities for men to develop and express positive identities in a wide range of very responsible organization roles, to interact in groups, perform tasks and interact with the community, apart from using tools and technology in the speedway activity. The organization also positively addresses several of the World Health Organization determinants of disadvantage for men, particularly by providing opportunities for wellbeing, social inclusion and community engagement, through organizing and participating in a productive, relaxing, regular and enjoyable outdoor speedway activity as well as by recreation and exercise.

The Gascoyne Dash is a relatively new and quite different 'modern' organization, highly dependent on a large number of volunteers and new technologies including interactive web sites. While most of the small numbers of active organization participants are well-educated, professional men, the annual event actively involves and presupposes involvement of a wide range of other groups. The core group develops and practices a number of aspects of communication in the Australian Core Skills Framework, particularly interacting in the community. There are highly developed mechanisms for training volunteers to perform tasks and use tools and technology. The Motorcycle-based Club provides potential health benefits for its members, associated with regular, outdoor, motorbike-based events. Along with these benefits the club provides for its core group of members, friendship, regular contact with people and connecting with local, regional and State communities. In these senses, the organization actively addresses several of the World Health Organisation determinants of disadvantage for men, particularly social inclusion and community engagement as well as regular recreation and exercise, relaxation and enjoyment.

Sporting organisations like Kwinana Bowling Club provide opportunities for the development of several aspects of communication in the Australian Core Skills Framework. Being essential comprised of older men, it provides important opportunities for older men to express and share their identities both as bowlers, as men, and particularly as older men. While the activity is based around a sporting skill, the opportunities for older men to compete in groups both 'at home' and 'away' provides opportunities for regular and therapeutic interaction in groups, within the organisation, with other organisations and with the wider community. It simultaneously addresses several of the World Health Organisation determinants of disadvantage: including social inclusion for many older men who are otherwise socially isolated and some men who are prone to depression. It provides a new activity in later life that is recreational, regular, relaxing and enjoyable.

Religious and Indigenous organisations

Our selection of 'Religious, Indigenous and cultural organisations' in the six sites was difficult. We had a range of potential organisation types with sufficient interview data that extended, in Denmark to the *Denmark Environment Centre* and *Denmark Arts*. Because of the ubiquity of churches we have included one church narrative: from the *Denmark Anglican Church*, that we sense is illustrative of some issues to do with learning and wellbeing in faith communities but in no way illustrative of the diverse range and complex nature Indigenous or cultural organisations. We could equally well have selected the arguably more fundamentalist and less ecumenical *Shark Bay Anglican Church* in Denham. The only Indigenous organisation that we had sufficient interview material for a coherent narrative was the *Aboriginal Heritage Reference Group* in Albany.

Denmark Anglican Church

A brief picture of the organisation

St Leonards Denmark Anglican Church building with its small, simple, wood-lined panelling and deep red, hand-adzed jarrah floors dates back over 100 years to the timber town's origins. In the church foyer is a sign which reads

Built in 1899 when Denmark was a company town devoted entirely to the timber trade, by voluntary labour. Reputedly Norwegian workers played a dominant part. Hence the sharply pitched roof and the imported Baltic pine lining.

More recently the town has been more reliant on people who are more likely to have come to marvel at and protect the stunning coastal forests and to enjoy and contribute to the town's relaxed rural ambience and diverse 'new immigrant' community. Men actively involved in the Anglican Church tend, like older retirees 'Mike' (62), 'Kevin' (76) and 'Charles' (82), to be older. Mike regarded the church as ...

Absolutely beautiful, in the sense that I go to many churches in the world, St Marks in Venice or any place whether it's Hungary or Vienna and you come to the church and it's all dark and it doesn't seem to have any spirituality. And yet this church is so spiritual, jarrah floors, stained glass windows. We really enjoy it, particularly the position of the church as well, the morning sunlight comes through the stained glass windows.

Learning through the organisation

'Kevin', a retired priest aged 76, retired for six years in Denmark, saw 'enormous change' going in the Denmark community and church. Kevin's own thinking in relation to the church and its role in teaching about scriptures had also shifted.

The Anglican Church has been here for 100 years in the same vicinity it has always been part of the community. ... A lot of things the fundamentalists or even evangelists do ... no longer suit the community. [In my previous postings as a priest] I used to think 'What have I got ... that can help other people?' and the broad answer was my friendship, nothing else, not my sermons. I found that with friendship offered you invariably got friendship received and offered in response. ... I ultimately gave away the idea that the scriptures and the word of God can't be changed.

Coming to the Denmark Anglican community and communicating these ideas about change to some conservative parishioners was not easy or simple.

The difficulty is of course when you come into this environment there are people who don't think like me. You have to take care of that because you don't want to put people off so you have to consider other people. ... You have to put it in such a way that it says "I am not threatening you" and frequently with sermons and things like that I will put in the phrase that says 'you don't have to believe what I tell you, all I ask is that you think about it' ... Individually, it is left up to the people at the time. Trying to get a change of concept of that 'big brother knows best' and this is what the church says in the church doctrines. ... It's really difficult to get that message across and get people to change.

Aged 82, 'Charles' and his wife had moved to Denmark from the Eastern states a year ago and found the Denmark Anglican Church community to be

... the friendliest group of people in the Anglican Church that I have ever met in my life. They accepted us right from the beginning and [we] were reading lessons in the church within a week or two of arriving. The Op Shop they operate is a very fine asset for the community and the church. Many, many people seem to come to it and I think they enjoy the friendship that they get inside the Op Shop.

Kevin agreed that people who come to the Op Shop are 'at least ... touching on the edges of the church, even if they are not church members.'

'Mike' aged 62 was also a newcomer to town, and while actively involved in the Anglican Church through his wife was himself a Catholic.

To me it doesn't matter which church you go to, it doesn't matter what you believe in. What we enjoy with being at the church in Denmark [is] that acceptance, friendship, inclusiveness and sharing. For example the church has people on a roster basis who read services on a Sunday morning, giving out the prayer books to other people, people who do the flowers and people clean the church and people work in the Op Shop, people mow the lawns, people do the gardening ... so its' participation and acceptance and friendship is very, very important. ... [The] service it is always very interesting and it does make you think and you really enjoy the service as well, because of the ambience of the church itself and the actual service in the church.

Mike and his wife, having walked away from a busy six day a week job before semi-retirement, "thought it was about time [they] focussed on spirituality."

Wellbeing through the organisation

The Denmark Minister is a woman with “the ability to connect with lots of people who don’t belong to the church”. She also spends two days a week as Chaplain in the local High School and in each of these contexts is independently regarded across town as contributing to the wellbeing of the wider Denmark community.

Wellbeing is also experienced in different ways by men who participate in various ways through the church. Charles, being newest to the town, particularly acknowledged the practical importance of the social functions and the importance of humour in the Church.

Not only in the church, but afterward. Every Sunday we meet and have morning tea and for new comers you get an awful lot of information around who does what around the town, who are carpenters, who’s the dentist, you get all the information if you ask for it, and people are very, very helpful. The services are not sombre services ... We do have clergy who have got a good sense of humour and there’s no problem in having a good old laugh in the church.

Kevin, who still takes one service a month in the church is having a productive and enjoyable retirement through his spiritual involvement in and friendships through the church. He particularly enjoys

... the people: I love meeting people. ... The friendship is terribly important to me and to my wife. I like the opportunity of taking services because I have been taking them all my life. ... I found that in being retired I am able to think a lot more and read a lot more and therefore a lot of my ideas are being formulated in the past four to six years - that’s where I have found that I am very different. ... A lot of people seek experience of God ‘second hand’. So how do you experience God first hand? My basic answer to that is “I see the experience of God in friendships with other people. I see it in the actions of other people and I see it in the relationships that other people have.”

Kevin acknowledged that the spiritual nature and wellbeing outcomes associated with the Church. [It] allows people to come into an environment where they can be influenced in living, in life, with the creation of attitudes that [includes repentance]... Repent means to change your ways and I think [Jesus of Nazareth] was on about changing ways for us to fit in with the way that he knew which was God’s way, the spirituality way... You get love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness and all the rest of it ... [I] have come to the conclusion that my definition of spirituality is simply a life that endeavours to follow those things ... I believe that God is ... the reason that gives me those things ... Why does he do that? Because I look at the life of Jesus and I see that’s what he is.

Mike acknowledged the important work undertaken by the Anglican and Catholic churches in supporting community men’s sheds, and anticipated opportunities for something similar locally.

I think there is a great need. There is a great problem for men in communities in towns. ... A lot of people [who] are unemployed or they’re sick or ... retired, particularly the men, are lonely and there are so many suicides. If they could get involved in doing something. The problem with all the churches in any town is that there are not enough people who attend, so the church can’t provide enough services. ... I have the idea that the [local Council] with maybe the help of the churches combined, should have a service called, for example, ‘Denmark Helping Hands’ ... to engage these people. ... These are people who are on their own who should be moved out of the lounge room and from in front of the TV to do some community work.

The role of men

The three men were asked about the role of men in the Denmark Anglican Church. Mike acknowledged that the Op Shop mainly involved women in the Church and that the women benefited from congregating and communicating. He also suggested that

Women are much more spiritual, much more emotional than men ... Men have the same emotions but men suppress their emotions not like ladies. Ladies are much more out-coming with their emotions than men are

Mike explained that one of his highlights in the Church was a

... live-in weekend called the *curculio*, Just for men. They do have a separate one for the women. as well. Its’ really spiritual and there’s friendship ... its people sharing, emotions, which is very unusual for men because they are not emotional. I really enjoy that and the greatest benefit to me is that you meet

people from all the States in all of the south west and you make friendships, and if it happens to be in town then you go to church and you know somebody. It's wonderful.

Standing back

Religious organisations like those examined in Denmark provide many opportunities for the development of several aspects of communication in the Australian Core Skills Framework. Being essentially comprised of people of similar faith, churches provides important opportunities for people, including a minority of mainly older men, to express and share their identities as Christians through worship and community activity with people in their own Church, and in the case of ecumenical organisations, with other churches and faith communities. While the activity is based around regular interaction in common faith groups, there are ample opportunities to perform a wide range of church functions with other organisations and with the wider community.

Churches like those examined simultaneously address several of the World Health Organisation determinants of disadvantage: including social outreach, inclusion and community engagement for some men who are otherwise socially isolated. The church provides continuity of religious practice and a range of activities throughout life that can be engaging spiritually as well as regular, relaxing and enjoyable.

Albany Aboriginal Heritage Reference Group

A brief picture of the organisation

The three Aboriginal men interviewed at the Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA) office in Albany were closely related members of the Albany Aboriginal Heritage Reference Group. In the interview the terms 'Uncle' and 'Auntie' are used by the men to refer generically to fellow Aboriginal relatives. As 52 year old 'Brendan' explained, the Group was basically about learning and sharing their culture. It's ...

... a gathering of ten Aboriginal families who live in the area [who] have various responsibilities for the area in regard to Aboriginal culture. We're members of one of those families. We're interested not only for ourselves but for our grandchildren for the future of young Aboriginal people. [The Group] s a learning place where we have been able to pick up the cultures and learn what we didn't know before. When people get together we share, and when we share we learn. ... It's a good place to practice our cultures, which is our respect for Aunties and Uncles. Aboriginal people talk about culture but we don't practice it enough. The Albany Heritage Group is a place where we can practice our culture.

It was also about safeguarding land subject to development, as Brendan elaborated.

There are a number of projects that are involved. We went out [recently] on a heritage survey for the Department of Environment and Conservation. We give advice to the anthropologists and archaeologists in regard to the land. If any development [is proposed], ... the [Aboriginal] men and women come together and make a decision on how they should manage it. ... We are giving advice ... and they will take our advice on board and work with us. Without that, they wouldn't really get the go ahead.

Learning and wellbeing through the organisation

The men were asked about the learning benefits of participation through the organisation. 'Brendan' reflected on the important opportunity and privilege that the Group provided for Aboriginal people to be heard with 'a bigger voice', after

colonisation 200 years ago ... You feel you can have a say and can listen. This is an opportunity ... for people to speak up - in our homes and out fishing and out around the country. People have got opinions about ... what should be done, but [if they are only] talk, they mean nothing. ... To come together in a Group and have your say is a good opportunity for people to be heard and [also] to share [and] gain knowledge. It's an opportunity to be heard with a bigger voice ... That [voice] goes down through family ... my father and kids and grandchildren, indirectly they benefit. I am the spokesman for my fourteen grandchildren and one great grandchild ... so there are about 17 in my little family alone.

I see it [as] a privilege, to be involved in this Group. My involvement is through being actively involved and learning more about the protocols and processes relating to different aspects of our culture, like

burial of ancestral remains, about returning objects, particularly stone artefacts around the country where they belong. Our Group has a role in this community of managing heritage and culture and it looks at every aspect. We do surveys for Government and non-Government agencies that look at our car parks and buildings and sub-divisions that affect our landscapes. ... We are learning more [about] the importance and respect that needs to be given to aspects of our culture and life. The land is important to all of us, but it's more important to our people because we come from the land and it's part of our culture.

We are learning more about our own culture Like we are doing some restorations of fish traps here in Albany. ... Also Albany has got some old graves in the old cemetery and there are 65 Aboriginal rellies buried there. We are finding out why they were there and where they were put, what year and all that information. Every aspect of our culture in relation to Aboriginal heritage.

'Max' 42 really enjoyed

... the company of the elders. I like to sit back and listen. The feedback can be appreciated but I am in a role where I feel more obliged to listen more rather than to speak up too much. I feel my Uncles speak very well. ... I feel more comfortable with male elders than I do with the female elders

'Jake', 50 acknowledged the many places and ways he and his Aboriginal relations had learned throughout early life, particularly through participation in team sports like football. There are

... a lot of different places where we learn. We learnt from Mum and Dad when we're little and from brothers and sisters and then that family extends out to your cousins and your close friends. ... We all went to school in Albany like our Uncles and Aunties and our name is not to put shame. [At] high school we all played sports. We have all got a very good name ... in the town with football, cricket, netball, basketball ... [and] with the sporting organisations. We learn [through sport] as well [about] how to associate more and a lot better with all the people. We have had some really good friends and I still have them now, really good friends from my football days.

[Even] if you aren't educated and you can't read, you can still play football. That player can get the best player on the ground as well as the big tall fellow. Its even. It's just up to you. Football is a very good evener and you have a very good community thing. We catered for a premiership here, we turned the town upside down one year ... to be involved in organised things like that and to be involved in a successful premiership with the football team makes my family very proud wise. ... Our protocol is to look after our name and the future of our family and we do that. So it's all a learning process, when we're old we learn.

We live in a contemporary society, us Aboriginal people, and we have prospered within that because we are good at it. A lot of the things that are fundamental to us, like caring about people and our families are really important to us. We know as Aboriginal men [that] we become strong in the community based on our efforts. That's our culture and that also reflects around our family responsibilities and all the other things that are important. Our role in this ... Group is being recognised now by the non-Aboriginal community as being the place to go to get good advice on Aboriginal areas culturally. People come to us for knowledge and understanding about our people and our culture. We have got a range of people with skills, well educated people in an academic sense, and knowledgeable and well educated people in a cultural sense. Our culture first is all about sharing.

It's a great opportunity. ... We are getting involved in those projects through this Reference Group ... Outstanding stuff and that gives us a sense of confidence. ... We are proud people, we never stop being proud people. It seems ... we can make it a career with our degree of knowledge and our culture, a very successful career [to do] with the gaining and sharing of knowledge. ... More and more things are turning a cultural way. The Government has slowly but surely started to come on board with our culture. [It's even better for] the people in Albany itself, the community itself, the Wadjalla, the white people ... for the better.

Men in the organisation

While Aboriginal men and women work together for a common purpose, there are separate cultural protocols, roles and responsibilities in relation to men and women including in particular cultural sites. Brendan painted a sense of men's dispossession on top of the larger Aboriginal dispossession.

We work together ... when necessary with certain places. [Some] are known to be places for men where women don't go. There are also places for women where men don't go. We try to stick to that

and follow those protocols as much as we can. Working with women is good. They give a different perspective to men. In our culture the men acknowledge some things but their knowledge was no good if it wasn't added to by the women's knowledge. Men's and women's minds go together and one couldn't work without the other ...

As men our race [has been] influenced by a lot of things [including] alcohol. ... Our women have been consistent in a lot of ways in looking after our families and our culture and our men slipped a bit 'off the radar' We have had to establish ourselves again as men in our rightful positions within the community through this particular group. We are becoming more assertive in our in protecting and maintaining our cultural protocols and preserving our culture.

[Men have lost their way because of] dispossession[of] lots of different things, dispossession of men's things, men's business ... For a start, hunting was men's business from colonisation ... [For] hunting purposes, the [men were] leaders of their family groups. Slowly men were dispossessed of lots of things and the women had to take and look after family and their kids. [Aboriginal] men in the 1960s were given alcohol and the right to drink and a lot of men took up that right. Depression, dispossession and other things [happened] as well. But the right to tend your family and to look after them and be the leader of the family was taken away from those men, so our rights were taken away as well, the rights to defend all your family.

[I want our men's group to be a] *community*-based rather than an *organisation*-based group of men. I want to keep it along those lines, I want to keep it as community orientated as possible. [Some people say] when you get a group together you have to become a corporation, you have to do this, you have to do that ... We don't have to do anything. We just have a group of men and that's who we are, that's for us. We had 30 [in our men's group] last week.

Max agreed that Aboriginal men had important and urgent roles to play in passing knowledge on to the next generations of Aboriginal men.

We have a role as men to pass on our knowledge that we have learned and are still learning, our culture, our titles to land, to our younger generation that are coming through. Because we are not going to be around for ever, I always feel there's urgency that if we don't [teach] the next generation that is coming through. ... We have a big role to play for our younger men and that's the same for the girls coming through. I feel very privileged to be able to do this as well and I am lucky that I have got some really respected Uncles that have taught me so much.

Standing back

Indigenous organisations like the one examined in Albany provides many opportunities for the development of several aspects of communication in the Australian Core Skills Framework. Being essentially comprised of Aboriginal people with similar cultural backgrounds, the Cultural Heritage Group provides important opportunities for men to express, share and enhance their knowledge and Aboriginal identities through purposeful community activity within their own community, in collaboration with the wider communities and levels of government. Indigenous organisations such as at the one examined in Albany simultaneously address several of the World Health Organisation determinants of disadvantage: including social outreach, inclusion and community engagement for some men, families and the broader Aboriginal community. Indigenous cultural organisations provide opportunities for continuity of Aboriginal cultural practice and a range of activities for all generations that can be spiritually engaging as well as being relaxing and enjoyable.

Voluntary fire and emergency services organisations

Fire and emergency services organisations (including surf and coast rescue along the coast) are necessary and ubiquitous wherever there are populated localities in Western Australia as well as along the major highways. We have chosen to do narratives on two contrasting organisations at opposite extremities on the coast. The first is a small a very remote fire brigade, the *Denham Fire and Rescue Service* operating close to Western Australia's easternmost point, and the *Denmark Surf Life Saving Club*, operating on one of Western Australia's most dangerous, Southern Ocean beaches close to the state's southernmost extremity.

Denham Volunteer Fire and Rescue Service

A brief picture of the organisation

The Denham Volunteer Fire and Rescue Service (VFRS) has its headquarters in a shiny, new but compact shed in a light industrial, backstreet area of Denham. With the simple words, 'Fire Station' above its exterior double doors, on the day of the research interview a foraging emu wandered into the photo frame. Inside the shed, besides the usual safety gear and social area there is the well-equipped Denham VFRS truck.

Being a very small community the number of men involved in the Denham VFRS is also very small. As the fire captain 'Terry' explained,

It is very hard to recruit people. We have run through some really awesome times and our membership drops but we are always fortunate to have good members come in and built the team back up. You might think that eleven is not a big number, but for a small town fire brigade it is a fair whack.

The 52 year old Captain 'Terry' and 'Hugh', the 43 year old Appliance Officer joined two regular firemen, 21 year old 'Gus' and 58 year old 'Harry' for an interview about the learning and wellbeing they experience through the Denham Fire and Rescue Service. As with most sessions, food and a stubby of beer was part of the 'hook' on the evening of the interview.

Learning through the organisation

The volunteers meet on Tuesday night at 5.30pm for training. Captain Terry explained how training worked on a typical night. It usually involved

Testing or becoming more familiar with the equipment. It might be a hose drill. We haven't done a ladder drill for a while, but just the other day we did a suction drill down at the ocean using the suction lines. There are not a lot of training days in a year. At the end of the day, all you are trying to do is maintain a certain skill level and familiarity with your equipment so that when you do get called out to an incident, and we a 'low incident' brigade. Obviously we are a [relatively] isolated community and fortunately we don't have the incidents that [some other brigades] have. ... Our training is just keeping us in touch with our equipment [and] the procedures and just making sure that when something goes down that we are going to be sharp enough to handle it.

Almost all the training, as Terry explained, was hands on and ...

Definitely outside. We would do very little [inside]. On the odd occasion we have watched a DVD that has been put out by FESA [Fire and Emergency Service Authority]. ... Generally we just get out there and work the truck with the pump, work the cutters and spreaders, whatever the ... equipment is. Mainly we will decide on the night what we are going to do but sometimes, because there might be a little bit of planning needed ... we would decide that ... a couple of weeks beforehand.

Getting volunteers was enhanced through the Captain's professional role and networks at the local school. Gus got involved

...through our school teachers who encouraged us to go along and do something after school. I decided to get involved [at] the brigade and do a bit of training. I knew a bit of the equipment by then and really enjoyed it. A few of my other friends decided to do the same but they went off to University doing other things but they have come back now.

Terry explained how he encouraged younger volunteers like Gus, who are able to participate as full and active members once they turn seventeen.

I invite some of the High School students when they turn about twelve or thirteen. When they get into Year 8 I ask them if they want to become junior members and they can remain junior members. ... When they turn seventeen we invite them to sign up as active fire brigade members, and generally they will do the training. A group of my juniors were more interested in pumping some iron. We have a fair bit of [gym] equipment around [like] free standing weights and a bench press machine. ... [If I wasn't] working at the school it's probably less likely that they would have started something for the students. I started it [as] something for the students to do.

Hugh identified that the main learning for him through the brigade was "a little bit of discipline I suppose. We all have to turn up at the same time and all try to make an effort. Effort is important."

Terry identified “team work and probably a bit of leadership” as the main thing that the brigade members learn.

As a volunteer group, you can’t actually say that if there’s a callout the Captain is going to be there or the foreman is going to be there, it might well be that Gus or Harry are the only ones available and they have to take charge. They have to do it, so I think leadership is another skill that you are learning that all of us are benefiting from by being here.

Gus identified “... being calm in a stressful situations and the medical training” as important, other benefits to him.

I think you [also] get more self confidence: It’s probably something you haven’t done before and when you are in there ... the training, the team work and all that comes together.

Wellbeing through the organisation

For 21 year old Gus, it was “... good to join other members and do weights and have a chat, and its one way to keep fit.” Also, Gus explained that the younger school recruits

..., spend a lot of time together as a little group from school. If we weren’t at the fire station some would be playing computer games and some would be working on speedway cars or going for a swim ... [We] have very, very different hobbies. ... I feel I have made some good friends by training here.

For 43 year old Hugh the main benefit was the ‘social aspect’. “I have been here for 13 years and I just think it is something you can put back into the town”.

For 58 year old Harry who was relatively new to the town, the main benefit of being involved was ... the talking contact. I have only been in town for three years so it gets me a bit more involved with the community. I was in the bush fire brigade before I came up here so I just continued it on and so it’s just a professional hobby.

Other wellbeing benefits accrue through the involvement of the VFRS in the many aspects of the wider community.

The junior fire brigade usually do the Anzac and Remembrance Day services in town. They generally dress up and do the flag raising and lowering type of stuff. ... When we have the Far Western Speedway Championships every year we usually put our truck into the parades. ... At the school we usually put on demonstrations. Last year they had a ‘fun day’ and we went down there at their lunchtime and got the kids around and threw water over them. The Christmas party at the end of the year, we usually put the fire truck out and roll out the hoses and spray the kids. And we will drive Santa around. Quite often the Play Group will ring up and say “Can you drive Santa to our Christmas party or to this thing or drive the Easter bunny?”. They like to drive on a fire truck. We had an unusual request last year: it was a wedding so the bride arrived in a fire truck. We give advice to pensioners on smoke alarms, we encourage people to change their smoke alarms. Every now and then the brigade will be invited in to do a talk or a presentation to the kids at school. With the youngsters it’s usually a very simple, stop, drop and roll type thing where we get them to do that, and get to think about having an escape plan, so bits and pieces within the community.

The role of men

Women in the small Denham brigade comprised 40 per cent of all active members. As Terry elaborated, women and regular social contact involving food together are important.

We enjoy having the girls in the brigade. ... We would be struggling for numbers without them. It’s important for us to function as a brigade to have a certain base number to work with. Without their support, we would be in trouble. The women are very good members and ... it adds to the social life as well. We don’t get a lot of call outs but we train regularly and we always try to have some sort of social get together or something at least once a month. We have Christmas dinner and we have an annual [mid-year] dinner ... We have a lot of [District Officer] visits a year [and] we have a dinner afterwards. ... If the fire station needs a clean up we say we will have a ‘busy bee’ on Saturday and have a BBQ lunch ... afterwards.

Denmark Surf Lifesaving Club

A brief picture of the organisation

Denmark Surf Lifesaving Club's compact clubhouse is tucked away, totally hidden from the access road amongst the coastal scrub on the remote (but beautiful) Ocean Beach approximately 7km south of the town. The views from the clubhouse door are to die for. It looks directly out onto the full force of the Southern Ocean crashing onto nearby Anvil Beach, and to the left, towards the entrance to the beautiful Wilson Inlet, that the tannin coloured Denmark River empties into on Denmark's doorstep.

The research interview participants included Vice President 'Harry', 'Vince' the Club's Safety Officer, 'Will' who does the regular club newsletter and regular member, 'Quentin'. The Club, as its President 'Neil' explained, recently

... celebrated our 50 years at Surf Lifesaving on Ocean Beach ... We started off with nine members and now we have 210 approximately. The object of the club is to keep visiting members to the beach safe in the environment, but also to give the youth an understanding of water safety and to teach them survival techniques and first aid and ... help anybody in any situation that they might find themselves in.

As background to the insights about learning and wellbeing that follow, the IRB's, or inflatable rubber boats, as Quentin explained, are

... used to assist with rescues and to train people how to use it to rescue [others]. For the basic lifesaving stuff here we use surfboards for rescue with straps on the sides, and they are also used in competitions for racing.

The shed is stacked full of surfboards, IRB's, skis and other equipment, that as Quentin elaborated, "... are used both for competition and training because the club participates in Surf Lifesaving Club competitions."

While classified for the purposes of this research as an emergency service organisation, Harry, the Vice President noted the unique nature of the community activity that crossed over into sport as well as training.

We are a community organisation and we are also sporting. We have got gear out there that we can compete on and play games on and go away to carnivals and have races. There's also lifesaving gear to learn those life skills, so we are a little bit unique, there's no other organisation like us in Australia really. ... Because we are teaching juniors life skills and competition skills, so it's a bit hard to put us in [one category].

The official 'surf season' begins with registration each October and officially ends in March, though some members are active every weekend, all year round. Will noted that ...

We start training in November and start patrols in December. So we patrol every weekend, December to March and then our 'season' ends ... But because a lot of our members actually live in town close to the beach, a lot of people are down here in May, June, July ... A lot of the youngsters are here every weekend for a whole year for the surf ... Officially the club opens every weekend. We have four patrols [with] fifteen in each patrol. They will do a Saturday afternoon and Sunday as a voluntary patrol and usually do about 4 or 5 [rostered] patrols a year.

Learning through the organisation

The training involved for volunteers wishing to safely use every piece of equipment is rigorous. For example, as Quentin explained,

You have to qualify to drive the IRB - even to crew an IRB. ... The club has got training programs for drivers and for the crew. You train to be a crew member and then a driver ... we have people who train [within the club]. Then there's a written practical test and then someone will assess them and from there they will get a certificate or an award to drive the IRB and crew the IRB.

Vince chipped in and explained that the training is nationally recognised, formally accredited and assessed.

Surf Lifesaving Australia set out what the award criteria. They provide all the assessment by training programs and the assessment programs. All our awards are Nationally recognised the same as having TAFE awards or whatever.

Vice President, Harry noted that the training and learning started very early for youngsters, in a well-ordered sequence and based around age and physical ability.

There's a minimum age for joining and there's a sort of a process that they go through. A child who joins at seven will go through ... their age groups learning different things ... They will learn basic resuscitation and they go on to a Surf Lifesaving Certificate which means swimming. You have to be a really confident swimmer and you have to be able to rescue somebody. They may go on to their Bronze Medallion - it's the award that most general patrolling members ... have. ... Then you can go on and get your IRB certificate as driver or crew or whatever you want. So it's a process. As they get older and stronger - that's what the awards are based around. An adult can do the more difficult and the more physically demanding tasks.

The recruitment of new members is essential and important, as Will explained...

through schools. It's done through word of mouth. I am technically involved in junior soccer and you find that with kids at school you ask "What did you do on the weekend?" and they're "Surf. Had a good time". It's just amazing how many kids [are involved]. The parents are also very keen as this is quite a dangerous beach. They get their kids swimming in the pool because it has nothing much to do with swimming in the ocean ... so we regularly bring kids in and get them involved ... and it's hugely successful. I have been involved with the juniors for quite a few years. My wife was the junior leader she runs the whole thing, so we were very heavily involved in that and it was incredibly successful. We just went away for a Comp[etition] last weekend and we really did well for a small club. I can't speak highly enough of the people who run it.

Quentin further explained that the learning process also included 'training the trainer' with some trainers then being accredited as assessors., and for a need to ensure all people trained for responsible positions have current competencies.

You do train the trainer, and then you become a trainer and you might train a couple of groups and then you go on and do another award and then you become an assessor. ... To be able to participate in club activities and be on patrol through the season, you have to do a refresher every year.

Wellbeing through the organisation

Neil identified life skills as the main benefit, which had become the part of a now fulfilled lifetime dream.

I have learnt a whole lot of skills that are useful life skills, like the boat skills ... I am used to going fishing in my own boat. ... All the first aid stuff that you learn: lifesaving is very transferable. There's the health benefits, I am always down at the beach, I have always found the beach lifestyle suits me and this is the way of doing something for the community whilst doing it in an enjoyable way ... Like if it was pushing bodies around the morgue or something I probably wouldn't be involved ... but to be on the beach is an attractive community to me. My Dad was one of the inaugural members of the club and as a youngster here I can remember watching my peers doing their patrolling and going out on the surf boats ... So having been dragged away from here as a ten year old, I have spent most of my life wanting to be involved with the Denmark Surf Club if ever I came back and I eventually did. I have achieved a lifetime dream by that part of it.

Neil also pointed to the significant health benefits as well as the challenge, achievement and sense of confidence as President involved in nurturing the surf lifesaving community.

This is actually my last year [as President after five years] and I have really enjoyed the challenge. I think it is really great that the club has grown in numbers and it's just nice to feel that the club is there and [that] 99.9% of the time everybody gets on with everybody and they happily work together. There's that definite sense of community within the club and that's really nice ... Like when we have something on everybody comes down and I think that's a benefit. I feel that that's not necessarily my doing, but it's the general feeling in the club ... everybody works together. You get that [feeling that] "OK. Everybody is up to scratch". ... It just gives you a little bit more confidence in life. It's a leveller but it's also an experience that perhaps more people should do. It just boosts your confidence.

Finally, being a migrant, Neil was acutely aware that many families were in effect 'migrants' to the Denmark area, including from fragments of separated families living elsewhere in Australia, and benefited from the multiple ages and roles experienced through the Surf Lifesaving Club.

I don't have any family so [my kids] have missed out on the uncles and the grandparents. Denmark particularly has a very high incidence of single mothers and so the club acts as role models and one of the greatest things it has done is through soccer where it's just incredible ... [Some kids have] a mother in Denmark, [and a] father in Byron Bay - and they all want to be role models. When you have got migrants coming they leave their family suddenly all that extended family is cut off ... Places like [Denmark] provide that because you have got that range of ages, they have got a brother, uncle

father, grandad, whatever ... I know my kids enjoy meeting the range of ages through the club because I know they have really missed not growing up with their family.

Will became involved as a way of keeping up with his children and giving back to the community and also to the local schools, whose teachers are required to have a lifesaving award to be involved in camps and excursions that involve water-based activities. It is also about training kids to grow up to become responsible adults.

[When] my children joined this program ... I realised what they were going to be able to do - and I wasn't. I thought I had better 'pull my finger out'. I am one of the members who don't [do paid] work so I often get involved with the schools. I do a lot of community work with the schools. I pick a boat up when they come down, and its great to be able to help somebody else because when I was a kid I got a lot of help from other people. ... One of the greatest thrills is watching kids grow up ... They whiz off to Uni and when they come to the beach ... they are really well spoken, polite, always willing to do things. ... They are all actually absolutely phenomenal and that's a result of the training they receive and the people who have nurtured them.

For Will it is also about being safe,

... at one of the most dangerous beaches in Western Australia. Previously I wouldn't have gone for a swim in there most times and now I am confident to swim. ... I really enjoy the beach a lot more than I did previously as a result of learning new skills. My son basically lives down here. He has a key and would rather stay here than come home. ... It's really refreshing for people to come along and see how much [others in the Club] have done and you really want to do your bit ... so on patrol its just a fabulous feeling to be there.

As a man not in the paid workforce, it is also hugely important in Will's life to be able to give back what he had missed out on as a boy in Wales.

I was one of six kids and my father wasn't interested in doing things with the kids. He just went and worked. So when other people in the town played soccer and other sports, I always wanted to give that back. ... [I now] referee and run the soccer club [in Denmark]. [I enjoy] being able to give back and be part of this system whereby 'what goes around comes around'. I have watched these kids grow up, some of them from two or three years old. I see them on the beach and I think 'Wow! I helped that kid do something there' and the kids come back to thank you.

Harry was particularly satisfied with the enjoyment of teaching and reaching across all age ranges in the community.

Every boy I have taught can save someone's life. Some of them ... can apply it to their workplace. Some of the boys I have trained have actually got on and got jobs as lifeguards at Ocean Beach, pools, whatever. I think that's where I get my greatest satisfaction from, teaching the boys and girls and also the old people. I have done the whole thing, I have done thirteen year olds up to the oldies and I get a great enjoyment from it.

Vince identified the "incredible health benefit" associated with surf lifesaving that was linked also to a confidence through the training, about being capable of helping to save lives.

... because you do get active. A lot of men aren't active and it promotes activity, fitness. The first aid skills are probably very important. My son has a nut allergy and we are always conscious of safety and first aid issues. Here at the club of course that's part of your training and probably one of the most valuable assets is the first aid. You can actually help someone if they're dying or in distress. Being a keen surfer - and our family is always down the beach - you want to know that you are pointing people in the right direction - where to surf and where not to surf and what the hazards are and if something does go wrong, that you know that you are capable of rendering assistance and saving someone's life. That's a good feeling to have to know that you are not a helpless person. If something bad happens you can be on top of it. The confidence level that you have through the training gives you that good feeling that you can help if necessary.

Vince also pointed to the inter-generational, community benefits of training for ...

... teenage boys, myself and older middle aged men. It's a real leveller going out and doing your training and doing your work books and everything like that. You get to know the kids and they get to know you and also through the patrols you can always say 'g'day' to little nippers, the teenagers, the older people. It's a really good way to integrate the community.

Finally and importantly, the wellbeing benefits to Vince were about family enjoyment.

One of the other things about coming down here as a community thing is that it's a great place to come down here and relax in the summer when the holidays are on ... the food is brilliant, the location as well, you can sit up there and eat the food and relax.

The role of men

Harry, the Vice President explained that the gender roles in the Surf Club had changed over the years to the point that there is approximate gender equality at the younger participants ages. However as in many clubs there remains a gendered division of adult voluntary labour.

Until 1980, females actually weren't allowed to be involved in the movement, but since we have done that we have gone ahead in leaps and bounds. ... On our management committee we have a secretary as female but then we have a sub-committee that does clothing, juniors and a kiosk, that provides food. They are mainly women run that. They are better in the kitchen than blokes. ... The managers who look after the different [age groups] are mostly female. ... We are trying to get more female members on it.

Standing back

Fire and emergency service organisations like the Fire and Rescue Service examined in Denham and the Surf Lifesaving Club examined in Denmark provide extensive and rich opportunities for the development of all aspects of communication in the Australian Core Skills Framework for adults of all ages, including older men. Each fire, emergency service, coast rescue and surf lifesaving organisation has its own distinct identity. Being relatively small organisations there are ample opportunities for men involved to learn skills and take on specific and important roles and identities over many years. There are ample and regular opportunities for intergenerational learning and training. It is essential that men also develop bonding social capital to trust each other in teams that in practice, can be about life and death. There are rich opportunities through the regular training and drills to perform tasks, use tools and technology, interact within the organisation, with a wide range of other organisations and with the wider community.

Fire and emergency services, like those examined in Denham and Denmark simultaneously address several of the World Health Organisation determinants of disadvantage: particularly community engagement but also inclusion of men with limited formal education and some men who are otherwise socially isolated. Active involvement in these services encourages men to remain relatively fit and healthy and also to regularly exercise to ensure they are able to respond to unknown, future emergencies.

Age-related organisations

While together 'age and disability organisations' formed one of the organisational categories, in practice organisations in five of the six sites were age-related. Two organisations in the same region: *Carnarvon Senior Citizens Club* in remote Carnarvon and the *Shark Bay Silver Chain Home and Community Care (HACC)* service in very remote Denham have been selected to illustrate the learning and wellbeing benefits of age-related organisations to older men.

Carnarvon Senior Citizens Club

A brief picture of the organisation

Our surveys showed that older men prefer to do set things on set days, recognizing the importance of social benefits. While it was always going to be difficult to get men from Carnarvon Senior Citizens Club to volunteer to take part in a research interview with someone from the other side of the continent, the local contact person anticipated many of the research findings about attracting men and knew how to do it. He offered the interviewer his house to do the interviews, greatly simplified the plain language statement, advertised 'tea and sustenance provided' and as a further incentive organized transport 'for those that need a lift', and played down the formal part of the research intent by noting that 'in a previous life [the researcher] was a member of *Mulga Bill's Bicycle Band*'. The interviews were conducted outside on a veranda around a snooker table,

punctuated by the sound of the warm morning wind, metal cutting in the adjacent steel fabrication yard and the occasional barking dog.

The bait worked for four diverse men. From youngest to oldest there was recently widowed 'Max', 58, thirteen years in Carnarvon, three years a member of the Club and recently widowed. 'Vince', 63 was getting around on an electric 'Gopher'. 'Wally', originally Samoan and 63 had been in Carnarvon around twenty years but only joined the Club a year ago. 'Stan', 84 had been a member of Senior Citizens Clubs elsewhere for fifteen years before moving to Carnarvon an joining up five years ago.

Vince suggested that participating in Senior Citizens was kept pretty simple.

We just go in [one day a week - every Tuesday] to play really - and talk about things - and laugh and joke. You can play indoor bowls ... We have got dart boards all set up but nobody is interested in playing darts. We have a snooker table and bingo every Wednesday night.

The men agreed that it should be more often to fit in with the three day a week local bus service that with the help of the Tuesday hospital bus currently enables them to get to the Club in downtown Carnarvon from the suburbs. As relatively young Max elaborated, "One day a week is just not enough. It should be at least three ... [That would] give us a lot more to look forward to. The bus needs to be accessible for these old people. They need to have a ramp." The men recalled when the rule was that you had to be a senior citizen ("65 for a male and 60 for a woman") to participate. Now all citizens were welcome. On other days except Sunday programs like Tai Chi, Bingo and Gentle Exercise are available to Club members as well as to the wider public.

Learning through the organisation

Vince was particularly passionate about what he learned from and about other people at the Club. My goodness. The people who are there. You learn a lot about them.

Max, being recently widowed, learned and cared about others through the informal interaction, including by giving back.

Take 'Jack' for instance. He looks a nice guy, but put him on a billiards table and my God he's a devil. He's boom, boom, boom ... You have got two or three in the morning and 60 or 70 in the afternoon. It's the interaction with the other people. You learn about other people ... about their age, their playing and things like that, and you talk I like to talk to people about their indiscretions, Like 'What's the matter with you?' I was caring for my wife for nearly twelve years. I am a very caring bloke. ... I like to look after people. It's not what you get from the club, it's what you put into the Club.

Wellbeing through the organisation

The men essentially get friendship and a 'good feel' from participating in Senior Citizens. Vince indicated that he

... [goes] down there to [have meals and] mainly to meet up with all my friends but [using a Gopher] I can't stand up to play snooker, or play darts. It's too awkward to play bowls.

To Wally,

It's meeting new people. Since I have retired and joined the Senior Citizens I have met a lot of friends. I just like meeting my mates.

By contrast, Max

... had a wife and she recently passed on ... I do look forward to coming here. I like watching other people enjoy themselves and seeing what they did. I thought I would like to get involved, not necessarily on a committee but as a member and I get a lot of enjoyment out of that. ... The Club has become more important since the loss of my wife. ... If I didn't have this club I would be sitting at home vegetating. ... It gives me a very good feel every Tuesday. I get a good spark here once a week. I get morning tea if I want morning tea ... We get outings every now and then. ... There's always something to look forward to.

Stan too saw it as ...

... just an outing. ... You have a good laugh. [It's] mainly the friendship of the people and the bowls of course and the old billiards occasionally. ... I haven't been a member of too many clubs because I

didn't give up working until I was 77 or 78. I have been a loner most of my life. I was born up here and I thought I would come up here. [My wife] passed away up here as well. ... Yes. Born here, will die here, so there.

Vince really enjoyed going to different places for a meal,

This Tuesday, for instance, we went to the Harbour View Café and had fish and chips for a change that was fantastic ... That sort of thing I could not do on my own.

The role of men (and absence of Aboriginal senior citizens)

Stan acknowledged that "There's more women up here [in Carnarvon] than males. ... The males have the Old Bastards Club and the Bowling Club ...". Wally figured the only way to get more men involved was to "Put more grog in ... You have to get that spirit."

Max recollected about how things had changed for senior men in Carnarvon since the introduction of drink driving legislation.

Before we established the Senior Citizens Club as we know it now we used to meet regularly at the Carnarvon Club which is a licensed premises. It has about half a dozen dart boards up there and a small snooker table and two very large billiard tables. That was a big attraction along with the grog ... Then the snooker came in about the .05 [drink-drive legislation] and everything just fell away. The committee at the Carnarvon Club a long time ago decided to bung everybody's membership up and the Senior Citizens turned around and said "We don't like this. We don't want this. we will go and make our own building" ... That was about ten years ago ... [The Senior Citizens Club is] a relatively new building. ... [If] the grog [was] on you would have more blokes down there than there are women. But now if you go down there, it's more women than blokes. Unfortunately alcohol seems to be a main ingredient for entertainment, I mean I'm agreeable to alcohol don't forget about it, but if we have alcohol we will also have problems with people who will come in there and just want to drink, drink, drink alcohol - and we don't want that.

There was debate and mixed views about the appropriate role of women in the organisation. Max suggested that women tended to take over in the Senior Citizens Club.

The women down there were the boss ... They were the Treasurer, they were this they were that, and even if they weren't on the committee they acted as though they were the boss. They tried to make the blokes fit in a particular 'little box'. They've got a particular idea of where the bloke should be. To try and break out ... and get onto committees is nearly impossible. ... They do a fantastic job, but they do like to be "This is our patch, stay away from it" if you know what I mean.

Stan disagreed. "Actually, I think without women on the committee I don't think it would be much of a club really. ". Vince chimed in that "Women tend to dominate the whole thing. They are the hand that rocks the cradle and rules the world. Everybody knows that."

Max was also critical of men's perceived apathy, their insularity and a denial of being old enough to be regarded as a 'senior citizen'.

Blokes tend to be very apathetic and insular. You really have to try to get inside them to bring out that inner person ... Inside most blokes is another person just waiting to come out ... I mean they will just not let that person come out. [Many older men say] "I will not join that club because I'm not bloody old enough. Even though I am 85 years old I will not come". ... It's a characteristic among men. Belonging to a Senior Citizens Club ... is a stigma. It's almost like saying "I have got one foot in the grave and I won't do it." The majority of people down there [at the Club] are ... called *loners*: like they are [mostly women] on their own. It would be a lot better [if they all came together].

Vince agreed that men "... just won't admit that they are old. They will sit around being miserable."

What was more striking is that very few of the significant proportion of older Aboriginal people in Carnarvon are involved in the Club. The explanations were revealing. One man suggested it was because there was

No grog. They've got more problems of their own. There's always this inter-feudal fighting amongst themselves. They do have their own centre down here at an enormous expense which nobody uses.

The comment was reinforced by another who elaborated "No grog. No interest in interacting with any sociable circle other than their own."

Shark Bay Silver Chain

A brief picture of the organisation

Silver Chain operates across much of rural and remote Western Australia to provide high quality health and aged care services. The service for older residents in the remote Shark Bay area is particularly important as there is nowhere else to go.

The only program for the small number of older men in Denham was Home and Community Care (HACC). Without the support of the HACC services these men could not live independently at home and would be reluctantly forced into care in Geraldton or Carnarvon. The HACC men interviewed included 82 year old Harry, a resident of 39 years who uses a motorized gopher. Seventy four year old 'Nobby' and 'young Charlie', 72, the latter weather beaten from the subtropical sun, had both been in Denham for 15 years.

The main HACC service in making sure older people are safe in their own homes, as Nobby explained

If [the HACC nurse] hasn't seen any wheelbarrow or that around, she will go to that house. Or if they don't turn up [on a particular day] she [goes] down to the house. The nurses will go to see what is going on and to see if they're all right.

Charlie agreed.

I don't go down to get my paper this morning, because I'm a regular at 9 am. If I am not there by 10 am someone will get in touch and say "Have you seen anything of Harry?" or whoever it might be and then they are there five mins later.

The half dozen or so men enjoy coming to the shiny new, air conditioned building every Friday lunchtime (and sometimes Saturday) for 'an outing', typically by minibus. The men are consulted as to where they want to go.

We [may] have lunch or we might go down to the [local] Heritage Centre, or we might go up to the [distant] Overlander [Roadhouse], or to Monkey Mia or the [nearby] Little Lagoon. We get around quite a lot.

There is also a popular 'annual' weekend trip further afield, last year several hundred kilometres to the nearest town south.

Learning through the organisation

Most of the learning is about each other. Harry reckoned that ...

... you don't really learn much. It's just to come here and have the company of other people. ... We have little natters. Harry might tell me something about when he was up bush or I might tell him about when I was up bush.

Nobby remarked.

We don't really do anything. [It's] comradeship. We don't go to each other's house but we meet here.

The learning is essentially that someone cares about them in their old age, as Charlie explained.

What you learn by coming up here is that the Government and the Shire look after us: they look after old people. ... People who are sitting home all day ... might [otherwise] not get any help at all. We are just forgotten about. If [Silver Chain] wasn't here, the Shire and the Government just think there's only a few old people here and you can go to buggery. 'The Chain' looks after us. ... It is very important to look after old people.

Wellbeing through the organisation

Harry's wife is not in the best of health. He particularly benefited from

Getting down here on Fridays, the communication with others around the town and a bit of enjoyment, that's about it. ... If you are having a problem, [HACC] is only a phone call away.

Harry, at 82 would live to do more in the community but his mobility was now limited and he felt handicapped.

I would like to do a lot more in the town but I have had an operation on my hip and I have a crook leg now and I can't play golf, I can hardly walk. I am sort of handicapped. Before I came to this area I was playing golf three times a week, tennis two nights a week and up until two years ago I was walking 5

km and jogging 5 km every morning. [All I can do now is ... sit on my backside. I can't even do any gardening.

Nobby explained that

I live on my own and the carer comes in ... every Tuesday for an hour ... and goes right through the house. I find it hard to mop my floor and she does all that. Any thing you want doing, they look after you, and little messages and things. Like I love my garden and for me to get potting mix is a bit awkward on the gopher and she gets that for me. [Here] I get to meet with my old mates, we go pick the wild flowers, all sorts of things, its good. ... I look forward to it. [You get to] meet people out there and enjoy yourself.

Charlie similarly gets

... a lot of enjoyment out of it. Just getting together here and having a bit of a yarn and catch up on the gossip. Some times we might play [bingo or] bocce. Every so often with the bus we go to the Overlander [Roadhouse] and the bloke from Carnarvon comes out and has all his fruit and vegies there and we get all that, a big bag full, ten times as much as you get here [in Denham].

The role of men

Despite the obvious benefits of HACC, the men all agreed that a lot of other older men in Denham are stubborn, insular, and fiercely independent and won't come.

They have an inferior[ity] complex. They don't want to mix with people there. They have their own lifestyle out there. They don't like each other, you get plenty of that. ... They get on with other people, but they have just been that long doing their own thing they won't go to the HACC program. One old bloke ... wouldn't come for a long time because he didn't want to leave his dog. [Now he comes and] leaves his dog just down there and they give it some water. So now he is starting to turn up, and now he's starting to eat because before he didn't eat much. That's one of the things about coming here. [Men] can eat and that's a good thing.

Standing back

Age-related settings and organisations often have difficulty engaging men in later life. Age-related organisations like the Carnarvon Senior Citizens Club and the Silver Chain Home and Community Care program examined in Denham can provide important opportunities for older men to practice a small number of aspects of communication in the Australian Core Skills Framework. In both organisations men had particularly enjoyed opportunities to share, reflect on and reminisce about their previous roles, lives and identities. At this later stage of life many (but not all) men appear to be less interested in interacting with the new communities and using new tools and technologies and more interested in sharing and making sense of their often rich and diverse, previous lives, associations and previous communities of practice.

Age-related organisations like those examined provide rich opportunities for relating older men's early lives to their later lives. The other, main areas of the World Health Organisation determinants of disadvantage addressed by programs such as these are related to social inclusion of sometimes isolated men, community engagement, recreation, exercise, relaxation, food and enjoyment.

Men's special interest organisations

Men's special interest organisations are extremely diverse. While one main, traditional men only organisation, the Freemasons is in decline, one Masonic narrative from the *Gascoyne Lodge* in Carnarvon has been included because of the contrasting light it throws on the recently emergent and rapidly expanding community men's shed movement in Western Australia, with over 20 sheds already open to mid 2009. Fremanshed, the *Fremantle Men's Shed* is included as an organisation narrative because of the many facets and opportunities of men's learning it has creatively tapped into. We could have included what we see as one of the parallel, hands-on, craft based organisations that are mainly but not solely for men: the *Albany Maritime Foundation 'Boat' Shed* or the *Denmark Woodturners*.

Fremanshed: Fremantle Community Men's Shed

A quick Google search will take you to the Fremantle community men's shed website where it tells you that the Fremantle community men's shed is a not for profit organisation that started with the idea that men from the Fremantle area would benefit from having a shed where they could work on projects for themselves and for the community. The shed provides a workshop space where men from the local area come together to work, share and expand their social and educational networks. The Shed also connects men to community and support services to enhance their health and wellbeing.

Learning and wellbeing through the organisation

When asked about why the men participate in the shed, many commented on the friendship and sharing of skill and ideas amongst other men in the shed and also the contribution they were able to make to the local community:

We're setting up a metal work shed down here at the moment, they can do anything they like, there's wood work and metal work and through the shed we are helping out people, we can't afford to get well known contractors in so we are trying to help them out, so that's what I do down here the woodwork and the metal work.

I find it very convenient because I just live around the corner, I can come and do woodwork and I find that the company is good and we have a great time ... on the social side we have sausage sizzles, BBQs and things like that and I find it very enlightening, very inviting. So I'm very interested to come down here.

Well as I said I come down and show some of the fellows things to do and that gives me a pleasure to be able to pass on my skills ... also the camaraderie that comes out of the job. I think most of us when you get to an age where we welcome the support of others.

Some of the men described how the shed was a place for them to come to get away for the house, socialize and share advise:

Well it gets me out from my wife for a while... I come up three afternoons a week, as I say it gets me out of the house. I think it's the fact that you don't have to stay at home, you get more out of life, the socializing and that 's why I come. I have got a workshop at home and I could do my work up there, but if there's anyone who wants any advice I could help them ... I think a lot of fellows would say that, by just coming along you are not just doing it for somebody else you are doing it for yourself and you get something back in return.

While others found the shed acted as a springboard, enabling them to become more involved with the broader community and have greater involvement in other clubs:

Also I have noticed since I have started coming here I have started socializing at other places as well, at the bowling club ... there's quite a few of us go up there on a Friday night and it all started out with myself coming down here and a couple of the guys took me up there and I have met other people up there ... I can socialize right through the community.

When asked about community contribution some members were keen to discuss how they are able to assist local community through their shed activities:

... A lot of people send stuff up here to get stuff fixed and usually there is no charge, but they might make a donation. I don't think women's refuge get charged because they are a self-funded organisation.

I often tidy up people's gardens and lawns and not charge the people anything at all because we know it's a hardship case. Some members pressure us about this and think we're crazy but for us to know the satisfaction that we get from doing something like that, and it is a satisfaction and it feels good. We have done it often and we continue to do it.

Men in the organisation

The Fremantle community men's shed currently has 70 members and is available to men from nine to 90 years of age. The Shed is opened on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Saturdays. The shed space is also available to other community activities on Thursdays and Fridays. The health

and community benefits of the shed are clear and well evidenced through this members comments:

I'm nearly blind and I am making a coffee table and I (inaudible), so yes it helps me a lot because sitting at home I can't do much and instead of sitting around at home I come down, it's only a ten minutes walk so I come down here and do bits and pieces of woodwork. The coffee table is turning out really well and I'm very proud of myself.

Carnarvon Masonic Lodge

A brief picture of the organisation

Masonic Lodge rooms are found in most towns and suburbs in Australia, have involved several generations of Australian men but have very rarely been seriously researched in terms of their learning or wellbeing. The 'Craft' of 'Masonry' in 'The Lodge', as participants call it, has often been viewed by outsiders, mainly as a consequence of the secret fraternal pledges it apparently requires of its all-male Freemasons, as a conservative, almost clandestine and anachronistic organisation from a bygone era. There are lots of jokes and myths about Masons and what happens in the Lodge room.

The attractive (ten year old) leaflet that the fourteen North Western Australia Lodges distributes nevertheless emphasises the *Warm Fraternal Welcome* as well as the lodge locations, the regular monthly meeting nights and the contact telephone numbers. The Gascoyne Lodge in Carnarvon meets ten times a year in full, formal dinner suit and regalia on the first Thursday of the month, and each June 'installs a new Master'. The standard formal regalia is justified by the claim from one of the men that "Because we are all dressed the same and we're all equal, it doesn't matter what stage in life you are at, when you come into life, you are equal. ... It's a leveller"

At the time of printing there were 200 Lodges and 9,000 Freemasons in Western Australia in most major towns. Another colourful leaflet designed for recruiting new members is headed 'Friend to friend ... It's no secret' and has images and names of many well-known Freemasons across the state, the nation and the world. It emphasises the 'proud' nature of Freemasonry and 'the fine character of it Members'. The leaflet claims that Freemasonry is '... one of the world's oldest and largest Fraternities' dating 'to antiquity'. It's stated purposes are 'universal benevolence', through 'bonds of friendship, compassion and brotherly love'. Freemasons are seen by their organisation as 'men of charity and good works ... who meet as equals ... from diverse political ideologies, but ... meet as friends'. The leaflet stresses that 'Freemasonry is neither a forum, not a place for worship. Instead, it is a friend of all Faiths, which are based on the belief in a Supreme Being.'

An older leaflet in the lodge social room in Carnarvon, issued in 1980 by the Western Australia 'Grand Lodge', makes fascinating reading 30 years hence in the context of the recent sudden growth in Australia of hands-on community sheds. Without wishing to stretch the men's sheds analogy too far, one of the oldest records is of stonemasons engaged in building St Albans Abbey in England around 1200AD erecting 'a shed' or habitation 'lodge' for the use of the builders. As these 'lodges' proliferated and became formalised, the 'master' took on 'apprentices' whose 'education and welfare' became the responsibility of the group.

As men have special feelings of love and sympathy towards the members of their own family, so members of the Craft have special bonds of Masonry and are moved to assist them in times of distress or need.

With this long and deep tradition the researcher was therefore surprised to encounter a wide cross section of quite 'normal' men inside the Gascoyne Lodge, Carnarvon Chapter (the only signage on the typically windowless street frontage), located on the picturesque Carnarvon waterfront Fascine. Seven men: 'Ollie', 'Steve', 'Ed', 'Frank', 'Toby', 'Aaron' and 'Herb' participated in the research interview, relaxing in shorts, joking and sharing a stubby of beer in the social area of the Lodge room. All but one of the men (Toby) had been in the lodge over twenty years, indicative of the difficulties of engaging younger men in an organisation with a general image problem amongst younger men.

The Lodge was classified, for the purposes of this research, as a 'religious organisation' on the basis that it presupposes a belief in a Supreme Being. While this classification was contested by the men we interviewed, Frank admitted that "... religion does come [into] a lot of our ceremonies which are based on the Old Testament of the Bible - and it draws on a lot of chapters within the Old Testament". Lodges could nevertheless be equally regarded as a 'men's special interest organisation' by virtue of its all-male 'brethren' and its emphasis on the 'fraternal'.

Learning through the organisation

The learning is, as Aaron explained, about "High ideals, like charity and consideration for others, a code of conduct".

Frank saw Freemasonry as being much wider than member and family self-interest.

It's really a training ground to make everyone a better person in a well rounded way. To be good members of society and respect other people and other people's views.

Toby saw Freemasonry as

... like a big family. We will look after each other, but by the same token, the teachings help the [wider] public because we all have the same perception of doing right. You are valuable to everybody.

Toby also acknowledged that while Freemasonry was not necessarily religious, he was getting to know at least some of the Old Testament scriptures and much of what he learned was ...

... more historical - learning more about arts ... I get more enjoyment out of the history side of it. I can't say it is religious or spiritual. I can see history and what has brought history back. It's very enlightening.

Part of the learning is the fraternal 'grip' of the Masonic handshake as well as the shared rituals.

It's a privilege to be amongst the fraternity and be entrusted with that grip and token. The Freemasons is given that right from Day one of joining. It's one way of identifying a brother by day or by night.

Wellbeing through the organisation

Steve explained the many

... benefits when I come down here [to the Lodge]. I get to meet friends I have had over a few years, and it helps me talk to people a bit better and the companionship between the brethren and you have your ups and downs with people. I get a lot of enjoyment out of it. It's a place where we get together and enjoy company and learn particular things that you have to recite. ... I am able to communicate better to people than I used to do. I communicate better with people ... My wife gets rid of me for a night, but she enjoys it, but I am actually meeting with people. So I have an outside interest - it is not just the two of us. Because it is family orientated, whenever you go to another Lodge, you are looked after by the other [by the other family]. What I like about Freemasonry is that every one is equal and when you walk through that door. It doesn't matter whether you are a king or a beggar. We do a lot ... but we don't publicise it. Publicity is done by other clubs and they usually like to have their names on it - but we don't.

Frank saw the Lodge's main role as being primarily social but there are other benefits

It is also personal development, you learn skills. If you're a shy person, you learn the techniques of public speaking. ... Everybody participates, so they get added confidence which I am sure will flow on to a job or doing public duties around town. For instance it helps me, I am involved in public relations now so you do get confidence to actually talk to other people,. You meet strangers and you are able to convey a message, It's all part of the Masonic tradition.

Sandy, the only recent recruit found the ceremonial activity stimulating. It's ...

...very good for stimulating your mind. When you are in the ceremony you have to recite things so it teaches you to restudy. ... When you get to a certain age, once you stop using it you lose it.

Similarly, Ed found that the Masonic Lodge appealed to him ...

.... because you were coming and learning and it's educational. It's pretty hard keeping up with some of these old fellows who have been in it for years ... It helps the memory and [with] remembering things.

Ollie saw particular value in the Lodge's " ... friendship and togetherness. That's the main thing for me. I like being together with all my friends."

All of the men acknowledged the benefit of meeting 'brethren' from other Lodges.

Last Saturday we attended a Lodge in Exmouth ... 362 km away. We usually travel as far as Geraldton. In the tourist season we get a lot of visitors. ... They have to talk and explain where they are from and what they are doing, so it is supportive. You always get an invitation back to where they are from, down south or up north or over east. You meet some interesting people.

Frank expanded on the wider, social benefits to the community.

We have got facilities to supply scholarships for kids for further education. We have got widows of ex members ... or even members in need ... It is incumbent [on you to] make sure that all the members are looked after. It's the all encompassing camaraderie.

Toby, the most recent new member, saw the institution of Masonry as

... a great networking place, and not for monetary gain but for social interaction for all sorts of personalities no matter where they might be. It gives you the opportunity to spread your wings and go out there and meet and greet with other cultures involved.

Toby also noted that ...

We also give donations to schools and churches. They might want their roof repaired so we might make a donation to the church. Or the school might want to travel with a band or go away swimming, and we can help out there.

The role of men

Apart from the requirement to believe in a supreme being, only men can apply to join, and then only with the permission and support of their female partner, as Ed explained.

[When] you apply to join the Lodge you have an 'investigation team' that goes and visits your wife or partner. If your wife or partner says 'No' then you can't join the Lodge. ... The things that the Lodge work on are: family first, work second and then Lodge. ... Most of the women get very enthusiastic about it because in every Lodge you go to, the wives are there to support us. ... They come to social events. They're the ones who make it all work.

Frank cheekily but accurately clarified.

You mean they make the sandwiches and iron our shirts. If we have a family function ... we do all the washing up that we wouldn't do at home.

Herb, who came late to the interview, explained that part of the barrier to recruiting other men to Freemasonry was the traditional ban on soliciting or canvassing new candidates, including advertising and the media. Men effectively have to *ask* and *want* to join rather by personal contact and example rather than being asked or forced. Partly for this reason, the Gascoyne Lodge has not had a web presence, but ...

... that is coming to the fore now ... There's a few in Perth that have been. The Mid-Western is a new area and they're doing a website and we are going to be part of that ... Hopefully that will encourage or involve a wider range of people to travel and people might pick it up, to see it and wonder a bit more about it. I think going out on the web is trying to make a connection with other people.

Steve acknowledged, perhaps as an understatement, that for a range of reasons the Freemasons were facing

... a bit of a generation gap. We did not catch hold of the up and coming ones, there was a big gap, and now its hard to get back into that gap. The younger ones have different ways and now it's a lot harder to grab [them]. We have been trying to grab and invite the ones that have been wanting to join because they have to be asked to join and we are hoping through them, their mates will talk and they will come in and have social nights and invite them along, show them the room and have a general talk so we can encourage them to come. We don't want to force them in. We want them to come freely of their own will.

Standing back

Organisations in which men are the main or only participants are very diverse in nature. For this reason, the outcomes associated with them are also different. The main similarity is that they both

involve communities of men's practice. The two organisations examined above provide some different learning benefits but somewhat similar health and wellbeing benefits.

The Fremantle Men's Shed provides productive, practical, hands-on activity through woodwork and metalwork. It provides extensive and rich opportunities for the development of all aspects of communication in the Australian Core Skills Framework directed towards the needs and interests of older men. There are ample opportunities for older men to learn and develop new skills using old and new tools and technologies as well as to practice, mentor others and share existing skills developed from men's previous work and lives. There are opportunities to interact regularly in small groups, to perform tasks, interact within the organisation and through the products they make, to interact with and benefit the wider community as well as the men themselves.

The Gascoyne Lodge is much more inward looking. The main activity is restricted to the core group of 'Freemasons' who take on and practice a 'Masonic' identity. They tend mainly to interact either within their own Lodge or with other Lodges across a wide region. Men regularly practice and perform semi-religious, ceremonial tasks that involve rote learning of texts and performance to the group. There is some limited interaction also with the wider community.

Both organisations simultaneously and actively address several of the World Health Organisation determinants of disadvantage: particularly social inclusion and community engagement of men, some with limited formal education and others who might otherwise be socially isolated. Active involvement in practical hands on activity in the form of voluntary and cooperative work in sheds and through Masonic Lodge meetings encourages the practice of skills and in the case of men's sheds, enhancement of men's productive ageing. Community sheds and Masonic lodges both provide men with opportunities and incentives to remain fit and healthy enough to actively participate at any age, to reconnect with past lives and hands-on or communities of practice with other men and to combat the likelihood, for some older men of depression associated with withdrawal from family, and community and coping with changed abilities with age.

Discussion

Our discussion seeks to 'thread together' the diverse narrative and survey data from diverse community organisations in two ways. Firstly we critically examine the learning opportunities available through a convenient and widely recognized Australian theoretical filter: the six aspects of communication identified in the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF). *Personal, cooperative, procedural, technical, systems and public communication* are seen to be involved respectively as providing opportunities through learning for adults to *express identity, interact in groups, perform tasks, use tools and technologies, interact in organisations and interact with the wider community*.

Secondly, we critically examine the opportunities for enhancing health and wellbeing available through a convenient and widely recognized international theoretical filter: the nine World Health Organisation (2003) 'Determinants of Disadvantage' (and some alternative opposites). The data and our analysis is particularly focused on four of these determinants of disadvantage (and some possible ways of addressing them): *social exclusion* (social inclusion and community engagement); *unemployment* (employment and productive voluntary work); *early lives* (later lives) and *stress* (recreation, exercise, relaxation and enjoyment). In some organizations two additional determinants or disadvantage become relevant: *food* and *substance abuse*.

Men's learning through the Australian Core Skills Framework filter

The narratives above richly illustrate the ways in which diverse community organisations have the capacity to involve and include men. The most effective learning is associated with community contexts, which cast men as co-participants in hands on, shared group activities. The learning is particularly rich if, in apart from the focus of the activity (on learning, sport, fire and emergency services, gardening, art or shed based practice), there is parallel consideration of the changing needs, wants, interests and aspirations of the *men themselves, as they productively age*. All organization types examined provide a wide range of opportunities, albeit in different combinations and with differing emphases, for men to learn, develop and practice all six, inter-related aspects of communication contained within the Australian Core Skills Framework.

In the case of *personal communication (expressing identity)*, there is evidence of significant opportunities for men to develop, express, model and share positive identities as men. The particular value of organizations such as sporting clubs, fire and emergency services organizations, gardening, craft, arts, environment, churches, Indigenous and shed-based organizations is that they encourage and provide opportunities for developing and enhancing positive identities for older men without naming or foregrounding the benefit. The most successful learning appears to be associated with men as equal, co-participants in a group activity rather than as students, customers or clients. This success is enhanced in settings such as men's sheds and gardens (but also in some sports) where the shared actively provides a context for men to learn about productive ageing and about how to stay as fit, active and as healthy as they can be for as long as is feasible.

All organizations provide varying opportunities for men to engage in *cooperative communication (interacting in groups)*. These opportunities are richest in relatively small community organizations where a high proportion of volunteers work in teams or groups have opportunities to take on responsible roles within the organization. In order to fulfill these roles there is a need for high levels of cooperative communication.

Learning is particularly rich for older men in organizations, which also provide opportunities for *procedural communication (performing tasks)* and technical communication (*using tools and technologies*). Both these aspects of communication presuppose a practical context in which the tasks are undertaken and the tools and technologies are regularly used. While these opportunities are available in some sports they are again richest in fire and emergency services, shed, sporting and garden settings where men are able to work productively for the common and community good in groups.

Opportunities are also available in all community organisations included within this study (with the possible exception in some education and training providers where participants are treated more as students or as fee paying customers or clients) for men of all ages to maintain and take on ongoing, responsible roles within organizations. There are therefore ample opportunities for men to practice *systems communication (interacting within organizations)*. Again, these opportunities are richest in relatively small community organizations where a high proportion of volunteers have opportunities to take on responsible roles within the organization. In order to fulfill these roles there is a need for high levels of systems communication.

Finally but importantly, most of these organizations actively interface with the wider community, providing rich and diverse opportunities for men to practice *public communication (interacting with the wider community)*. It is important to note that some older men who do not use the internet or other contemporary information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as a mobile phone may sometimes be 'passed over' when the responsible roles associated with both *systems communication* and *public communication* are allocated. This is because of the perceived inability to rapidly share information now routinely distributed in most (but not all) organisations via email, internet and mobile phone.

Men's learning through the World Health Organisation 'Determinants of Disadvantage' filter

The narratives above richly illustrate the ways in which diverse community organisations have the capacity to involve and include men. As for learning, the most effective ways of addressing men's health and wellbeing are seen from the data to be associated with contexts which cast men as co-participants in hands on, shared group activities. The wellbeing benefits are particularly powerful in community settings where there is active consideration of the changing needs, wants, interests and aspirations of the *men themselves*.

Firstly, all organization types examined provide a wide range of opportunities, albeit in different combinations and with differing emphases, for men's health and wellbeing to be enhanced in ways that particularly address the risk and reality of *social exclusion*. Wellbeing benefits associated with social inclusion and community engagement are particularly enhanced in smaller, community-based organizations where men's age and experience are regarded as positive attributes to the organization and to the communities.

Secondly, all organization types provide opportunities to address the critically important WHO determinant of disadvantage, *unemployment*. Unemployment is most relevant for older men of working age (less than 65 years in Australia) who want to keep working and earning. Men over 50 regularly reported widespread and blatant age discrimination in the workforce and disabilities associated with previous work. In many cases the community organisations we examined provided the experience of voluntary employment and productive work. In some cases, such as in Meals on Wheels organizations, this part-time, voluntary work can satisfy government requirements for mutual obligation in relation to income support whilst otherwise unemployed. It is unsurprising that the use of lower level vocational training on its own, particularly for older men, is demonstrably ineffective and inappropriate. The promise of work after training is particularly cruel for men who have been damaged by previous work, and who, if older, are likely to experience the same age-related knock backs when they apply for work.

Our research suggests an urgent need to reconsider the appropriateness of the term *unemployment* as it applies to men older than the formal retirement age of 65. Many men struggle with the transition beyond paid work, even when they voluntarily retire in a planned way at the official age. The decline in men's wellbeing, though partly related to the physical effects of ageing, appears in many cases to be adversely affected by changes in men's identities. The particular value of involvement in community based organizations before formal retirement age (and particularly before involuntary separation from the workforce) is the early and pre-emptive bridge that this regular involvement creates in terms of men's non-work identities. Community based activity can and does allow men to develop identities that exist independently of paid work, that allow for interaction in groups, within organizations and interacting with the wider community. The value of this interaction is enhanced for older men when this activity is more than individual and cerebral (knowledge or skills based). It is particularly powerful, therapeutic and likely to have broader wellbeing benefits when it is physical, social, involves other men and contributes to the organization and the community. This hands on activity has particularly strong wellbeing benefits, whether it be via sport, fire and emergency service volunteering, gardening or 'doing stuff' in sheds, because it creates, maintains and strengthens men's post (or alternative) work lives and identities through communities of men's practice.

Thirdly, community based activity for men have the capacity to allow men to reconnect with and positively build on often difficult *past lives*. A majority of older men had negative experiences of learning at school and left very early by contemporary standards. Born during wartime, a relatively small percentage of men in age classes over 50 undertook advanced formal vocational or university education or training. A higher proportion than in the general population have lower formal competencies in the five core skills in the Australian Core Skills framework including learning, reading, writing, oral communication and numeracy. Most also have relatively low information and computer technology (ICT) skills. Men over 70 in 2009 were at school during a major global war in Australia when opportunities for work, education and training were very different and typically limited.

Fourthly, community based activity for men has the capacity to reduce the significant *stresses* involved with changing and ageing. These stresses include the stress of not being in paid work for some men. Regular trips and hands on activities for older men in age-related settings, such as those provided through men's sheds, over 50s activity centres and gardening are enjoyable, positive, therapeutic and preventative in terms of men's health and wellbeing. They provide critically important opportunities for regular re-creation of past lives, exercise and relaxation as well as informal discussion of the many health and wellbeing issues that differentially affect older men, including prostate and bowel cancer, incontinence, hearing loss, depression and dementia.

Fifthly, some community organisations also positively address *substance abuse* issues that can affect men of any ages. These particularly include cigarette smoking and alcohol but also include other prescription and non-prescription drugs. In some organizations including some sheds and war service organisations, the activity itself is recognized as part of the treatment for depression.

Finally and importantly, all successful community-based organization recognize the value of food: particularly regular, healthy and social eating as a way of attracting engaging and benefiting men in

social and community activities. It can be as simple as a shared 'cuppa', lunch together in a men's shed or a picnic during a group outing.

Reflection on the links between learning and wellbeing

We have attempted in this research to actively 'join dots' that are seldom considered to be 'on the same plane'. Learning is conventionally and increasingly considered to be individual, personal and cerebral and necessarily associated with education and training professionals and 'providers'. Health and wellbeing have been conventionally and historically been regarded as being in the domain of health professionals and directed to 'fixing' individuals once they are 'broken'. What we have tried to do in this research is provide some new insights into the ways some community based organisations have an uncanny capacity to join the learning 'dots' and the health and wellbeing 'dots' in ways that are informal, effective, positive to, and therapeutic for men, in ways that formal learning and health approaches sometimes are not.

This study, in de Carteret's words (2009, p.504), is fundamentally and deliberately 'an exploration of informal learning and wellbeing in communities other than those understood as having an educational dimension'. Because of the huge volume of data created from interviews and surveys in 36 organisations in six categories in Western Australia, this report should be regarded as a first cut of a large and very complex and multi-layered cake sampled from six diverse sites in three regions of one huge and diverse Australian state. As a learning-related study it is unique, not only by being informed solely by men as informants, but particularly by men as participants in voluntary, community based organisations. Its other unique feature is its attempt to analyse learning as a wellbeing phenomena, not only in terms of participant intentions but also in terms of outcomes associated with participation.

Critics of our research might question our deliberate decision to investigate informal learning as a wellbeing phenomenon rather than purely vocational or cognitive phenomena. The copious evidence from all organisations about a wide range of positive wellbeing outcomes associated with participation supports our decision. Emerging research from other fields backs the postulated connection between community involvement and wellbeing in our study. For example the National Heart Foundation of Australia found that '... depression, social isolation and lack of social support are significant risk factors for CHD [coronary heart disease] – independent of and of a similar magnitude to the conventional risk factors' (Bunker et al. 2003, cited in DHA 2008, p.11). In our own study, during the past five years more than one in five men surveyed (22%) had experienced a major health crisis, one in five had experienced 'a significant loss in their lives' and one in seven had experienced depression.

Rather than counting adult learning as a public cost that adults might pay more for, it is timely to ask whether learning is or might become recognized as producing significant public wellbeing benefits that are economically positive. It is widely recognized that high levels of relative inequality, demonstrable from national census data in all communities we have researched, can and does harm the wellbeing of individuals and communities (Field 2009, p.34). Aside from whether there may (or may not be) an argument for more funds for higher levels of support for universities, technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and ACE (adult and community education), our research provides convincing evidence of the value to governments of community organisations assisting adults of all ages to negotiate transitions effectively (McNair 2009). These advantages are not only what we regard in our conclusion as the 'second steps' associated with initial labour market entry and re-entry, but also and particularly dealing with the critical 'first steps' often associated with wellbeing, including relationship breakdown, divorce, separation, bereavement, the onset of dependency, and moving location.

Conclusion

In order to embed the outcomes of this research in Western Australia in the wider international literature on lifelong learning, we have framed many of our conclusions around Field's (2009) review of the wellbeing and learning literature. In this we take a value position, backed up by our interview, narrative and survey evidence, that people derive critically important identity, enjoyment

and fulfilment in community settings. As Field (p.5) points out, '[M]oney alone is not enough. People also value their health, their social connections (including family) and their ability to contribute to the wider community'. Our research shows that, unsurprisingly virtually all (98%) of men were doing 'what they really enjoy' through participating in these diverse and fascinating community organisations and places. This enjoyment is also affected by place.

We conclude, from both the survey data and the descriptive organisation narratives, that the learning and wellbeing experienced through participation in community organisation is critically important to men of all ages. In essence, lifewide and lifelong learning are essential to men's identities both in and beyond the labour force through all six types of community organisations in all sites examined in Western Australia. Importantly, our study provides new evidence that learning is not experienced in the same way by men with different ages and work status or by organisation type.

The narrative analysis of the interview data by organisation type provides conclusive evidence that some community organisations *other than adult and community education* provide contexts in which a wide range of aspects of communication, identified formally in the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF: personal, cooperative, procedural, technical, systems and public communication), are actively learned and regularly practiced. Our research seriously questions the assumption in the ACSF that 'levels of performance' of 'core skills' (learning, reading, writing, oral communication, numeracy) is the appropriate starting point for analysing and formally addressing literacy for adults, in this case men.

We conclude that many community organisations provide rich and very effective contexts for men to develop and practice all aspects of communication. In the process of active and voluntary engagement, in community organisations, a wide range of wellbeing outcomes are experienced and achieved *through* learning. Our important finding is that significant learning and wellbeing are both very effectively achieved through co-participation in community settings, lifelong and lifewide. Further, the narrative data illustrate the ways in which learning and wellbeing are often tightly associated and often intertwined.

Importantly, we conclude that adult and community education (ACE) tends to be missing, less accessible to or less appropriate for men surveyed in the Western Australian regional and remote communities examined. Adult and community education (ACE) is known from international research (Field 2009, p.36) '... to be particularly effective in enhancing *the wellbeing of our most vulnerable citizens*. Any government that ignores this evidence is open to serious criticism.' Certainly there has been considerable recognition by commentators more broadly of the effectiveness and engaging nature of adult and community education programs (Foley, 2008, 2007, 2005; Volkoff, Golding & Jenkin 1999; Sanguinetti, Waterhouse & Maunders 2004). Much of the work done by adult and community education in the past has been associated with what we have termed 'first step' programs. By 'first step' we mean programs that assist individuals to engage with others, enhance community connectivity, make friends, enjoy sharing, and learn informally. We would argue that these first step programs facilitate opportunities for individuals to build confidence and continue with more 'second step' formal educational opportunities, if so desired, that would not have been available to them prior to engaging in these initial programs. As the opportunities to engage with these first step programs are being phased out of adult and community education by governments, including the Western Australian government, and replaced with a more skills-based program agenda, community-based organisations are taking up the slack.

One reading of this conclusion might be to argue that since adult and community education is not available to, appropriate or working for some men in Western Australia, unless community organisations like adult and community education are indeed able to 'bring in more blokes' (LCL 2003), informal learning might be relied on less and provided with less government funds. Another reading of our research might be to suggest that a greater amount of funding might be invested in what Field (2009, p.39) describes as '*a lifelong learning system that takes wellbeing as its primary purpose*', which as Field points out '*is likely to differ significantly from the present models*'. Given that one 'half of working age Australians in poor health are not able to participate in the labour force', we conclude that narrowly focussed vocational education policies and program, including

those being encouraged and preferred by national and state governments across Australia through both VET and ACE, are either insufficient or totally inappropriate for most men not in work.

As AMP (2009, p.27) concluded, despite the long period of economic boom until recently, ... individuals with persistent poor health experienced a decline in employment and earnings ... irrespective of gender, education and the area people lived in. It is safe to assume that such individuals may be among the segment of the population hardest hit by the current economic downturn ... in 2009.

Importantly, appropriate opportunities for learning for men not in work in Western Australian regional and major rural cities like Albany and Carnarvon is already missing. We identify the need for more 'first step' opportunities through adult and community education for men. Some of the models and pedagogies for successful 'first step' learning for men of all ages are to be found within fire and emergency services organisations. For some older men the first step, the only and holistic one lifelong and lifewide one required, is missing beyond organisations like community men's sheds and some senior citizens.

Separately, there is little evidence that the significant learning and wellbeing needs of communities with large adult male Aboriginal populations are being appropriately provided. It is shameful that in 2009 the only public access computer available in the large and relatively isolated city of Carnarvon is for limited or paid use within a public library or tourist information centre, that many men, including Indigenous Australian men would typically feel very intimidated to use.

In broad terms, we conclude that adult education, vocational education and schools tend respectively to target and address the needs of women as community members, men as workers and young people as prospective workers on the assumption that everyone is in paid work or should be working. Men who are not connected to community, unemployed, retired or not working expressed a clear and persistent desire in our research for positive ways to contribute to the community, to stay fit, independent and healthy. For many older men, being taught in off the shelf, accredited vocational 'courses', particularly in adult and community education environment, is typically neither desirable, appropriate nor available to them as governments place adult and community education more directly under the vocational education banner. Nevertheless half of the men surveyed *were* hypothetically interested in the opportunity of taking part in more learning: not through adult and community education as it is currently configured, but through the organisation in which they were surveyed; not through teaching but through mentoring or bringing in a local or outside tutor; ideally hands on, in special interest courses, in small groups and where they can meet other people.

Consistent with this conclusion about hypothetical future learning, men's general preference for learning was, in descending rank order of agreement: in practical situations, by doing; in a mixed group including women and in outdoor settings. While over half of men agreed they also like to learn in a group with men, 45 per cent of men disagreed. While male-specific organisations like community men's sheds are important for some particularly vulnerable men, we conclude that they are clearly not for all men and not for all of their learning or social time.

In the relative absence of appropriate learning opportunities to address positive ageing and social isolation of men, particularly for men not in the workforce or unemployed, we conclude that community organisations *other than* adult and community education are playing critically important roles as surrogate learning and wellbeing organisations. We provide new evidence of the relative effectiveness *as learning organisations* of both sporting and fire emergency services organisations (including coastal and surf rescue and organisations). Given that these organisations are more ubiquitous even than primary schools and found in most small and remote communities, they appear to play more positive and significant role in shaping the attitudes to informal lifelong learning for men than any other category of community organisation, including adult and community education as currently configured. And yet those men that do already come to adult and community education have significant needs for community connection and improved wellbeing. While four out of five men (99%) surveyed had experienced 'satisfaction with life generally', men surveyed in adult and community education organisations were significantly less satisfied with life.

Our most striking conclusion is about the difficulties many men we surveyed had recently faced. In the past five years one in four had experienced a significant loss in their lives; one in five had experienced a major health crisis; 17 per cent a financial crisis; 16 per cent difficulties with their business or job; 15 per cent had experienced depression and 14 per cent a new impairment or disability. We conclude that the organisations men belonged to were often important in maintaining and enhancing their identities, social relationships, happiness, health and wellbeing and buffering them against a wide range of changes with age, wellbeing and employment status.

We conclude that community organisations in Western Australia are helping men to learn about change. This particularly includes men learning to enhance their wellbeing to reshape their lives after a wide range of setbacks to do with family, identity, ageing, health and social and community relationships. It appears timely, as Field (2009, p.36) observed, '... to tackle the persistent gap between medical and other approaches to wellbeing. [O]ther interventions can also play an important role in an integrated strategy for promoting wellbeing'. While there is a widely acknowledged, general statistical correlation between levels of formal education, work, income and wellbeing, recent research in Australia has shown that the outcomes from lower level, vocational training are either minimal or negative for many adults. There is a concerning, general move by most nations towards more vocational training through adult and community education and TVET (technical vocational education and training) and away from funding and supporting adult and community education other than that which is overtly vocational. This move may be appropriate for some younger and unemployed people but we conclude it is inappropriate for older adults, particularly for older men who are not in work and typically retired. Learning can be a net benefit for relatively small cost. Learning is well known from research, for example, to be able to protect older adults from cognitive decline and support continued autonomy (Field 2009, p.36).

Consistent with international observations by Field (2009, p.36), we conclude that there is a need in Western Australia for adult learning organisations 'to align themselves with other services and campaigning bodies that are concerned with well-being', particularly for the lifelong and lifewide wellbeing of men. Conversely, health-related organisations are sometimes unaware of the wellbeing benefits of active community involvement including through informal learning.

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Appendix 1 Survey Instrument (Results and explanation added in []: from 187 returns in 36 organisations. Numbers are percentages of all returns. The original survey was customised for each organisation.



MEN'S LEARNING & WELLBEING

Survey of Men Participating in Western Australian Organisations

[Based on 187 returns from 36 diverse organisations in six categories in six sites in WA (Most numbers are percentages; most frequent of multiple responses have usually been indicated in **bold**)

Thank you for agreeing to complete this survey. It is for completion by you, as a man who participates in the community organisation above. The aim of the survey is to find out about you and what you get from your participation (Part A, Questions 1 to 5) and also your learning needs & preferences (Part B, Questions 1 to 13). Survey results will be available on request.

You do not need to tell us your name. We will not be reporting any information that can identify you. Please answer the questions by placing ticks ✓ in boxes or comment where appropriate.

Part A: Questions about you, your experiences and participation in this organisation

1. About your experiences in the organisation above

(Tick one box in each row)

	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %
I enjoy being able to participate when I want to	59	39	2	1
I enjoy the social aspect	49	49	2	1
I feel 'at home' in the organisation	47	50	4	0
I have some say over how the organisation is run	30	55	11	5
I have made good friends in the organisation	46	53	1	
I get a chance to mentor others	24	59	14	4
I enjoy the activities, trips or outings	35	55	8	2
It is best for me to participate on set times and days	20	55	23	3
The role of the organisation leader is important	54	43	3	0
I get to mix with people of different ages	41	50	9	0
I feel comfortable with women participating	46	48	4	1
Someone is responsible at all times	43	50	7	0

2. As a result of participating in this organisation ...

(Tick one box in each row)

	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %
... I am doing what I really enjoy	47	52	2	0
... I can give back to the community	47	48	5	1
... I have a place where I belong	32	57	11	0
... I expect to get more paid work	5	12	50	33
... I get access to men's health information	8	38	41	13
... I feel better about myself	28	65	7	1
... I feel more accepted in the community	26	58	15	1
... I feel happier at home	22	55	22	2
... my communication or literacy skills have improved	18	44	34	5
... my wellbeing has improved	20	60	19	2
... my confidence has improved	24	59	15	2
... my social skills have improved	22	57	19	3
... my organisation skills have improved	21	51	25	3

3. I regard this organisation as a place ...

(Tick one box in each row)

	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %
... to be with other men	19	56	21	4
... to meet new friends	29	65	5	1
... to get out of the house	19	48	28	5
... to learn new skills	29	54	14	3
... to help me keep healthy	24	51	29	2
... to give back to the community	38	54	6	2

4. About you. Tick if any of the following apply to you.

45%	I am a current or former qualified tradesman
43%	I am currently in the paid workforce
88%	I currently have a car licence <u>and</u> drive my own car
5%	I depend on others to get to the organisation
15%	I participated in a similar type of organisation as a boy
48%	I heard about the organisation through friends
6%	I was referred to the organisation by a health or welfare worker
81%	I am married or have previously been married
75%	I currently live with a wife or partner
44%	I receive some type of pension
82%	I am a father
57%	I am a grandfather
2%	I speak another language other than English at home
1%	I am an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person

5. About your experiences in the past five years.

Tick if you have experienced any of the following during the past five years.

In the past five years I have experienced:

12%	separation from a partner	79%	satisfaction with life generally
6%	separation from a family home	14%	a new personal relationship
13%	separation from children	35%	a new child or grandchild
25%	a significant loss in my life	16%	difficulties with my business or job
22%	a major health crisis	15%	depression
14%	a new impairment or disability	5%	unemployment
6%	loss of tools or a work space	17%	a financial crisis
25%	retirement		

Part B: About your learning in the organisation

1. How often, on average, do you take part in this organisation's activities? (Tick one)

11% Daily 32% A few times a week 33% Weekly
 7% Fortnightly 10% Monthly 6% Occasionally 1% Never

Please continue at Question 2 on Next Page ...

2. What type of learning, if any, is available through this organisation?

(You can tick more than one answer)

36%	Computers or internet skills
10%	Land management skills
30%	Technical, trade or craft skills
45%	Team or leadership skills
44%	Safety or health skills
43%	Communication or literacy skills
52%	Hobby or leisure skills
18%	Customer service skills
21%	Other learning <i>(Please specify)</i> : 32 descriptive responses (17% of all responses)

3. Is the learning you receive through this organisation useful in other aspects of your life?

(Tick any which apply in each row) [per cent of all cases]

Type of learning	Useful at home %	Useful at work %	Useful in the community %	Not Useful %
Learning about computers or the internet	63	22	32	23
Learning about land management	29	21	45	41
Learning technical skills, a trade or craft	45	22	48	22
Learning team or leadership skills	30	43	78	6
Learning about safety or health	58	43	68	8
Learning communication or literacy skills	39	47	70	15
Learning hobby or leisure skills	60	20	50	11
Learning customer service skills	15	29	58	29

4. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements as they apply to learning in and through your organisation. *(Tick one box in each row)*

	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %
Members of this organisation need more opportunities to learn	15	55	27	4
There is too much emphasis on learning things I can already do	2	11	74	14
My skills are already good enough for me to be able to take an active part in this organisation	16	69	11	2
There is too much importance placed on formal learning	4	12	73	11
There are opportunities to improve my communication skills	18	65	15	3
Learning is more difficult because of this organisation's isolation	5	14	62	19
There is not enough recognition of what I already know	4	19	70	8
I am keen to learn more	30	64	14	0
I would like to improve my skills	26	68	7	0
My skills help me learn with others in a team	22	64	14	0
Difficulties with my skills make it hard for me to learn	1	7	75	18
I actively take part in the learning opportunities that are offered	22	65	11	2
Being part of this organisation helps me to learn	17	74	8	1
Opportunities for learning elsewhere in this community are limited	8	29	53	11
This organisation's small size makes learning easier	11	61	25	4
This organisation should offer more opportunities for learning	9	47	40	4

5. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements as you think they apply to your organisation.

(Tick one box in each row)

	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %
This organisation warmly welcomes new members	66	33	1	0
This organisation is equally welcoming of male & female members	61	32	7	0
This organisation's resources are available for wider community use	28	56	14	2
This organisation only welcomes men	4	7	35	55
This organisation is well connected to the local community	43	50	7	0
This organisation has strong links outside of the town	27	52	19	2
This organisation's members are mainly men	10	33	43	14

6a. If more learning opportunities were available through this organisation, would you be interested in taking part?

49% Yes

43% Maybe

7% No *(If No, go straight to question 7)*

If 'Yes' or 'Maybe', which type of learning would you be interested in?

(Tick as many as you like)

28% A course to get a qualification

62% Special interest courses

43% In a small group

35% Field days or demonstrations

73% 'Hands on' learning

28% In a class

23% Through the internet

27% By taking on responsibility

14% Preparation for further study

39% Where I can meet other people

22% Individual tuition

2% Other way *(Please specify)*

2 descriptive 'Other' comments were added, out of 187 responses.

6b. How and where would you prefer these learning opportunities be provided?

*(Tick the **one** box in each column that you would most prefer)*

BY ... *(tick one)*

IN ... *(tick one)*

44% another member of your organisation with the appropriate skills

25% bringing in a local tutor/ trainer from outside of your organisation

18% bringing in a tutor/ trainer from outside of your town or suburb

6% the internet

5% a organisation elsewhere in a larger centre

1% Other way *(Please specify)*

88% this organisation

2% another local community organisation

2% a local community learning centre or neighbourhood house

3% an adult or vocational education provider

2% your home

2% a venue outside your local area

2% Other location *(Please specify)*

7. Most places have a community organisation where adults can go to learn things. When responding to the statements in Question 7, think of that organisation closest to where you live. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements as they apply to your closest adult learning organisation. (Tick one box in each row)

Statements about the 'local' adult learning organisation	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %
I don't feel comfortable going there	4	25	53	18
It is valuable to me as a resource	9	56	33	2
It is a useful place for me to do courses	7	65	26	2
I don't know enough about it to use it	9	25	57	9
I would go there more if more people I knew went there	2	22	62	14
I would use it anytime if I really needed it	17	69	13	1
I would go there more often if more men I know went there	1	25	56	19
It is held in high regard by the local community	15	68	14	2
It doesn't offer anything I need to learn	7	28	54	12

8. Your general preferences for learning (Tick one box in each row)

I generally enjoy to learn ...	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %
in a mixed group including women	28	67	4	1
in a group with men	9	47	38	7
in practical situations	25	72	3	0
in a classroom	11	48	35	7
by doing	37	61	2	0
on my own from books and other written materials	5	36	50	9
in outdoor settings	22	57	21	1
via the computer or internet	7	35	50	8

9. I would be more likely to be involved in learning if ...

(Tick one box in each row)

	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %
I had more free time	21	47	28	4
I had more opportunities locally	11	54	32	3
there were more male tutors or teachers available locally	3	18	67	12
there were sufficient learning resources locally	7	57	32	5
there was somewhere locally I considered a good place to learn	7	55	32	6
there was something I really wanted to learn	26	64	10	1
I had more support from my family or partner	2	15	67	16
I was younger	13	28	47	13
this organisation was open more often	3	24	60	13
my health allowed it	4	20	62	14
there were more learning situations where men were encouraged	4	33	54	9
programs or courses were available at times that suited me	9	60	27	4
I lived closer to this organisation	3	22	65	10
courses were shorter	1	26	66	7
I was more confident	3	24	61	11

OTHER THINGS ABOUT YOU

10. Please tick any statements that apply to you.

- 86% I am an active participant in this organisation
- 12% I am a returned serviceman
- 48% I have a leadership role within this organisation
- 34% I began participating in this organisation within the past two years
- 7% I have special needs (an impairment or disability)
- 26% I attended a formal learning program some time in the past year
- 47% I am retired from paid work
- 29% I really enjoyed learning at school
- 1% I am a fly-in/fly-out worker

11. How long (in years) have you participated in this organisation? mean 8.8 years

12. Your age:

- | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------|
| 3% Younger than 20 years | 21% 50-59 years |
| 4% 20-29 years | 32% 60-69 years |
| 4% 30-39 years | 20% 70-79 years |
| 13% 40-49 years | 3% 80 years or older |

13. Your highest completed formal education (*Tick one in each column*)

AT SCHOOL ...

- 7% Below Year 9
 - 9% Year 9
 - 29% Year 10
 - 13% Year 11
 - 42% Year 12
- education*

SINCE SCHOOL ...

- 12% None completed since school
- 24% Apprenticeship or Traineeship
- 37% Vocational Certificate or Diploma
- 18% University or higher degree
- 10% Other (*Please specify*) 10% indicated other formal

Thank you for taking the time to complete the survey.

Please place your survey in the envelope, seal it and return it to the person in the organisation who gave it to you, OR post it back as soon as possible (The postage is pre-paid).

Any **questions** about the project can be directed to the Principal Researcher:
Associate Professor Barry Golding, School of Education, University of Ballarat, P.O. Box 663,
Ballarat Vic. 3353 Ph: (03) 5327 9733 b.golding@ballarat.edu.au
Should you (i.e. the participant) have any **concerns** about the conduct of this research project, please
contact the Executive Office, Human Research Ethics Committee, Research & Graduate Studies Office,
University of Ballarat, PO Box 663, Mt Helen Victoria 3353, Australia. Telephone: (03) 5327 9765

Appendix 2 Organisation survey (with results added)



Organisation Survey

[Western Australia: Results Added]

FOR THE CONTACT PERSON TO COMPLETE & RETURN

Ideally to the interviewer, or else soon after in the supplied Reply Paid Envelope.

These questions help us to categorise and compare the many different types of organisations we are studying across Australia.

Organisation Name: [Results below are from 35 of 40 organisations]

ORGANISATION & PARTICIPATION DETAILS

[Results are in percentages other than where indicated: highest frequency response often shown in bold]

1. This organisation has been operating for:

Median 35 years (Range 3-110 years) **Years.**

2. This organisation has the following affiliations with similar organisations:

Tick ANY that apply.

Locally 53% Regionally 59% In this State **78%**
Nationally 47% Internationally 19%

3. This organisation relies on: *Tick ANY that apply.*

Financial members 47% Part time paid staff 42%
Full time paid staff 33% Volunteer staff **64%**
An elected Committee 61% Government funding 50%
A Management Committee or Board 44%

4. This organisation, its facilities, programs or services are available to participants on:

Tick ANY that apply.

Mon 81%; Tues **89%**; Wed 83%; Thurs 86%; Fri 86%; Sat 69%; Sun 58%

5. Organised meetings between members or participants usually happen:

Tick ONE that MOST applies.

Weekly 37% Fortnightly 9%; Monthly **51%**
Quarterly 3% Annually 0%

6. This organisation is open or active: *Tick ONE that most applies.*

All year round **71%** All but holiday times 11%
Frequently for specific activities 14 % Infrequently 3%

- 7. This organisation is available ...** *Tick ANY that apply.*
- | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| Mainly for men 9% | For a Specific Interest Group 71% |
| To the general public 6% | For either men or women 3% |
| Mainly for older men 0% | Only for men 0% |
- 8. Eligibility to become a member or participant is:** *Tick ONE.*
- | | |
|----------------------------------------|------------------|
| Assessed against a criteria 59% | Not assessed 41% |
|----------------------------------------|------------------|
- 9. The facilities of this organisation are shared with another organisation.**
- | | | |
|---------|----|---------------|
| Yes 32% | OR | No 68% |
|---------|----|---------------|
- 10. The four main reasons why MEN tend to join this organisation are:**
- | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. 35 descriptive responses | 2. 32 descriptive responses |
| 3 31 descriptive responses | 4 26 descriptive responses |
- 11. The four main reasons why MEN tend NOT to join this organisation are:**
- | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. 30 descriptive responses | 2. 23 descriptive responses |
| 3 18 descriptive responses | 4 12 descriptive responses |
- 12. The average number of different participants who access the facilities of this organisation each week is** Median 60 participants (Range 4 to 5,600) *Insert number*

LOCATION, LAYOUT, FACILITIES & ACTIVITIES

- 13. The facilities this organisation uses are:** *Tick ANY that apply.*
- | | |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Stand alone 57% | Purpose built 54% |
| Part of a larger building 23% | Not owned by this organisation 20% |
| In several locations 23% | For members use only 37% |
- 14. This organisation is:** *Tick ONE that MOST applies.*
- | | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| On a main street frontage 66% | In an out of the way area 34% |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
- 15. This organisation has an area for:** *Tick ANY that apply.*
- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Inside Social activities 88% | Outside Social activities 62% |
| Workshop/Craft activities 42% | Serving/eating food 71% |
| Keeping fit 35% | Drinking tea & coffee 71% |
| Serving alcohol 32% | Gardening 26% |
- 16. Activities in this organisation are:** *Tick ONE only.*
- | | |
|-------------|------------------------------------|
| Diverse 71% | Mainly focused on one activity 29% |
|-------------|------------------------------------|
17. Activities that participants undertake are mainly decided by: *Tick ONE only.*
- | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| An affiliated organisation 9% | The participants 18% |
| Managers or Staff 15% | Organisation Office bearers 29% (29% combinations of all 4) |
- 18. Activities in this organisation are:** *Tick one.*
- | | | |
|-------------------------|---------------------|------------------|
| Strictly controlled 30% | With some rules 58% | Without rules 6% |
|-------------------------|---------------------|------------------|
- 19. The organisation is involved in other charity or voluntary activities beyond its main purpose or activity.** *Tick one*
- | | | |
|------------|----|--------|
| 63% | OR | No 37% |
|------------|----|--------|

FUNDING, RESOURCES & RELATIONSHIPS

20. Participants pay to take part in particular activities: *Tick ONE.*

Yes 71% *OR* No 29%

21. Funding for this organisation is MAINLY from: *Tick ONE.*

Governments 44% Membership 27% Fund raising or donations 29%

22. At present, this organisation is: *Tick ONE.*

Totally funded 40% Partially funded 26% Underfunded 34%

23. This organisation is : *Tick ONE.*

Part of a larger organisation on the same site 18%

Part of a larger organisation but separately located 32%

Independent and stand alone 50%

25. The future of this organisation is: *Tick ONE.*

Very secure 43% Reasonably secure 54% Insecure 3%

Thank you sincerely for taking the time to complete this organisation survey

You are free to supply any additional, relevant information about your organisation,

EITHER to the researcher OR by post to:

Barry Golding, School of Education, University of Ballarat 3353 Victoria

soon after the interview in the (free) Reply Paid Envelope,

or later by email to b.golding@ballarat.edu.au

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF OUR RESEARCH PROJECT

Beyond the workplace

Men's learning and wellbeing in Western Australia

Research Project through the School of Education, University of Ballarat
for the Western Australia Department of Education and Training (WA DET)

Method: Literature review, on-site surveys and focus group interviews.

Project Time Frame: August 2008 - September 2009

Researchers: Associate Professor Barry Golding, Dr Mike Brown, Dr Annette Foley

Researcher Contacts: Barry Golding b.golding@ballarat.edu.au 03 53279733;

Mike Brown mb.brown@ballarat.edu.au 03 53279736; Annette Foley a.foley@ballarat.edu.au
03 53279764. School of Education, University of Ballarat, PO Box 663, Ballarat, Victoria
3353, Australia. Fax: 03 5327 9717

OUR AIMS & TYPES OF ORGANISATIONS WE ARE INTERESTED IN

Our aim is to study men's participation in community-based organisations in urban, rural and remote contexts in Western Australia. Our interest is in what men learn informally and what benefits the men, their families and communities get out of that participation.

We will visit, survey and interview men *of all ages* (in work, out of work, retired) in a wide variety of community organisations. The organisations we are interested in include *sporting, fire and rescue, aged care and disability, adult and community education, religious, artistic, cultural, environmental or Aboriginal organisations* as well as *men's special interest organisations including service clubs and men's sheds*.

We expect to find out what is attractive, common and different about participating and learning informally in a range of community organisations, to find better ways to engage and benefit other men.

WHERE & WHEN WE PLAN TO VISIT and WHAT WILL BE INVOLVED FOR PARTICIPANTS?

We have selected cities and towns in urban, regional and rural areas of Western Australia where the proportion of men not in the workforce (including in retirement) is higher than the WA state average. The urban areas **Mike Brown** and **Annette Foley** will visit will be Kwinana and Fremantle respectively. **Barry Golding** will visit the regional and rural and areas of Albany and Denmark; and the remote communities of Carnarvon and Denham/Shark Bay.

We visited each area first in **late 2008** to fully inform local organisations what their participation would involve and to seek their cooperation with interviews and surveys, planned for late **February 2009**. Cooperating organisations will distribute and collect approximately 16 surveys from men involved as participants in their organisation and also set up a group interview for us with three to four fully informed and consenting men.

This Western Australian project forms part of an international project on informal men's learning being conducted in Australia, the UK, New Zealand and Ireland. It has full University of Ballarat research ethics approval. The late 2009 results of the research to WA DET will be available on request and a copy provided to each participating organisation. No individuals will be identified in the research reports.

Appendix 4 Statement of informed consent (for interviewees)



UNIVERSITY OF BALLARAT
INFORMED CONSENT

PROJECT TITLE:	Men’s learning and wellbeing: beyond the workplace
RESEARCHERS:	Associate Professor Barry Golding, Dr Mike Brown and Dr Annette Foley

Consent – Please complete the following information:

I, of

 hereby consent to participate as a subject in the above research study.

The research program in which I am being asked to participate has been explained fully to me, verbally and in writing, and any matters on which I have sought information have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that: all information I provide (including questionnaires) will be treated with the strictest confidence and data will be stored separately from any listing that includes my name and address.

- aggregated results will be used for research purposes and may be reported in scientific and academic journals.
- I am free to withdraw my consent at any time during the study in which event my participation in the research study will immediately cease and any information obtained from it will not be used.
- once information has been aggregated it is unable to be identified, and from this point it is not possible to withdraw consent to participate.
- I understand that interviews will be digitally recorded and transcribed, but will be used in a way in which the participants cannot be identified (that protects anonymity and confidentiality).

SIGNATURE: **DATE:**

Appendix 5 Focus group interview schedule and protocols

Focus Group Interview Schedule & Protocols

Men's learning & wellbeing through community organisations in Western Australia

The interview

- *The recruitment of interviewees (ideally 3-4 in one interview) will have been organised by a known and trusted informant in each community organisation.*
- *The interviews will typically take place at the organisation or in another place familiar to the participants.*
- *Interviews will be audio recorded and typically be for 30 minutes.*
- *All interviewees will be fully informed and consent to the audio-recorded interview by signing a Statement of Informed Consent*
- *Each will take away a one page Plain Language Statement with project, research ethics and researcher contact details.*
- *Interview questions apply to men as active participants in a particular community organisation.*

The participant surveys

- *The interviewer will have sixteen (16) surveys, with the header customised for each particular organisation plus reply paid envelopes.*
- *One survey will be given to each of the men who undertake the interview who will be invited to complete and return the survey afterwards.*
- *The person who sets up the interviews will be offered the balance of the surveys (typically 12), but will be encouraged only to take the number that can realistically be distributed and returned.*

The organisation surveys

- *A separate and different survey will be completed by the person who set up the interview, about characteristics of the organisation*

Interview Questions

- Tell me about this organisation and what you do when you come here?
- What benefits do you get out of participating in the activities associated with this organisation?
- Do any of these benefits flow on to others, such as to your families, work and communities? Tell me about those benefits?
- What do you learn through coming here and participating in these activities? Give some examples.
- What advice would you give to similar organisations in order to attract, involve and benefit men?

Appendix 6

Request to organisation representatives to check the narratives in the Report Draft

We greatly appreciate the assistance you have already given us collecting information for our report, including completing and returning surveys and helping us with or participating in the research interviews.

As of late September 2009, we are finalizing our research report to WA DET.

From the 36 organisations that we interviewed in Western Australia, we have chosen just 12 to write 'narratives' or stories about. The 'story' of your organisation was chosen because it neatly captured and/or represented many of the important things we are interested in: learning and wellbeing through community-based organisations.

We have changed all people's names to try and protect confidentiality.

We have tried in our report to accurately report what we have heard on the audiotapes. However we (including our transcriber) can and do make mistakes.

We are asking you, as our contact person for your organisation, to read and check the short narrative section specifically about your organisation. The approximate page numbers for your section are indicated in the Table on the previous page.

This is **your opportunity before our report is finalised and published, to advise us about anything** you or others, including the people we interviewed, think needs changing in our report to:

- correct important factual **errors** in the narratives, particularly in the *Painting the picture* section.
- **protect the privacy, anonymity or confidentiality** of any people who are likely to be and/or who are concerned about being identified.
- suggest that **we add, delete or clarify** anything else relevant to your organisation that is relevant to what is already contained in our DRAFT narratives.

Thanks a lot. Please email us and tell us whether anything needs changing as soon as possible and at latest by 6 Oct 2009 to b.golding@ballarat.edu.au .

Alternatively, you could print or copy the relevant pages, and post them back hand edited to Barry Golding, School of Education, Uni of Ballarat, PO Box 663 Ballarat 3353 Victoria.

We plan to send you (and all 36 organisations) who helped us a full and final copy by the end of October 2009. Meantime, this is a FINAL DRAFT not for wider circulation.

Barry Golding, Mike Brown & Annette Foley, 24 Sept 2009