Federation of Workers Educational Associations

Te Whetereihana o nga Kaimahi Akoranga o Aotearoa

celebrating 90 years of community education

the wea

telling our stories

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WEA making a difference

Ninety years ago the Workers Educational Association (WEA) established a community education system in Aotearoa New Zealand based on the principle that education should include a non-formal option. The concept of "life long learning" was recognised and promoted by those early founders of the WEA.

To celebrate our 90 years the WEA has decided to share today's stories in this book.

The WEA now operates as a federation of independent organisations and it is the longest established provider of adult education in New Zealand. We share a common outlook, experience and enthusiasm for quality education.

In this book, people who have engaged in learning with the WEA talk about their experiences and what they have gained. They range from refugees acquiring English skills and Maori realising what it means to be tangata whenua, to people discovering their artistic side and tutors who continue to learn from their students.

They are a diverse group of people and we thank them for sharing their thoughts.

Many members of the WEA began their involvement by en-rolling in a course. WEAs are governed by volunteers who take responsibility for running an efficient, effective organisation that is accountable to both the membership and the funders.

Partnerships with city councils, secondary schools and tertiary institutions, unions and a network of other community education providers encourage local cooperation and a sharing of resources. Each WEA is conscious of its obligation to honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi/Treaty of Waitangi and is encouraged to develop relationships with local tangata whenua.

In 2002 the Government signaled in its Tertiary Education Strategy that Adult and Community Education (ACE) is a valued part of New Zealand's tertiary education system. WEA has responded to the challenges of new funding policies and appreciates the support of the Tertiary Education Commission.

Looking ahead, I feel confident that the education services provided by the WEAs will continue to fulfill our core objective of advancing, encouraging and providing community and continuing education that promotes a just and equitable society.

Roni Fitzmaurice
President FWEA

Celebrating **90** years

This year the Workers Educational Association (WEA) celebrates 90 years in Aotearoa New Zealand. Now under the umbrella of a national federation, the WEA has eight constituents throughout New Zealand and a Book Discussion Scheme it administers.

Throughout its history in New Zealand the WEA has remained committed to advancing, encouraging and providing community and continuing education that promotes a just and equitable society.

A commitment to Te Tiriti O Waitangi/Treaty of Waitangi and the bicultural partnership underlies all WEA activities. Like mainstream Pakeha society, this journey is developing!

Founded in England in 1903, the WEA was established to support the educational needs of working men and women. It is now the UK's largest voluntary provider of adult learning and one of the UK's biggest charities (www.wea.org.uk).

The philosophies of the WEA were adopted by other countries, forming a worldwide network and an association was set up in Aotearoa New Zealand in 1915. The WEA today focuses on issues and concerns of all workers, both employed and unemployed, particularly those who face forms of negative discrimination including women, Maori, Pacific Islanders, adults with literacy and numeracy problems, and beneficiaries including the elderly.

Outside the formal education system and now run largely by volunteers, WEA is able to respond quickly, creatively and positively to social needs.

WEA offers learning in a non-competitive environment, free from assessment and measures.

Each region has different community needs to respond to and the diversity of both New Zealand society and the WEA is illustrated in the stories within this book.

Commitment to lifelong learning

Sitting in his book lined home office in Palmerston North, Merv Hancock embodies the WEA in New Zealand. His memories of the organisation date back some 60 years to his boyhood in Palmerston North. As an adult he has been actively involved in the WEA in Manawatu and Wellington, including as President of Manawatu WEA for eight years.

It is clear from his environment that he is a life long learner and passionate about encouraging others to take an interest in local, national and international matters that affect their day-to-day life and the well-being of their community.

He's also something of a walking historian of the WEA in New Zealand. An academic for sure, but a social worker at heart, Merv has tracked the history of the organisation, personally and given more formal presentations on its activities.

He has a passion for history and has researched the life and times of Palmerston North MPs from 1870 to the present time and was instrumental in getting a WEA Local History group going in 1991 on the history of Palmerston North. Residents have explored the history of their street, suburb, and community groups, and the group is now an autonomous organisation.

"My own participation in the WEA dates back to when I was at high school during the war years (WW 2) and the WEA ran some evening classes. My father had a general interest in the WEA and I went with him to some lectures. His interest sparked my interest and my first major political contact related to the 1943 election, which had been postponed from 1941 because of the war, and was very controversial. A non-partisan constitutional lawyer called Frank Opie ran a series of lectures. He was a young lawyer practising in Palmerston North and constitutional law matters were very much in debate in the war years," Merv says.

He didn't have much to do with the WEA for the next 20 years as he was forging his career in social work, but he returned to his home city of Palmerston North in 1960s and wondered what had become of the WEA. He says there were many competing groups for adult education and that diminished the number of people interested in the WEA at that time.

Merv worked as a family counsellor before joining Massey University in 1975 as senior lecturer of social work. There he was also given the task of developing a new degree for social workers.

With his ongoing interest in the community, Merv continued to nurse an interest in getting the WEA up and running again and was able to do this in 1985. In the early 80s the WEA enjoyed a revival and Merv was invited to run lecture series – in 1980 and 1984 at the Wellington WEA summer schools and in 1982 at the Auckland summer school.

"They were participatory sessions and the people who came (to the summer schools) were people who had general educational interests and liked the idea of taking a theme and having it explained.

"Families with a social interest came along and there were activities for their children. There was a good social atmosphere. Isolated men and women from Wellington who were not going to have much of a Christmas were happy for a chance to be at a place with other people. In the evenings there were lots of activities and social events."

Merv says while the WEA was the standard bearer for adult learning, numerous other orgnisations emerged with adult learning as a focus and this was a difficult time for the WEA. It was no longer the only player in the field and funding got tighter and tighter.

He says the WEA has had to adapt to changes in economic and social structures as well as political structures, even though the organisation is non-partisan.

"We have a continuous battle with politics between benign indifference and sometimes outright hostility.

"The WEA has always been an alliance between working class people, unions and universities, with middle and upper class people who have a social conscience. When the relationship between the unions and the middle class is strong, the WEA is at its best. When that alliance weakens through changes in the social structure, the WEA declines."

Merv has tracked the relationship between politics and the high and low points of the WEA in New Zealand and says the resurgence of capitalism – from 1984 and ongoing - has so altered New Zealand's social structure, it has created an "under class" completely different to the traditional working class represented by the WEA when it was formed.

"The resurgence of capitalism affects the social arena – the status of women changes, there's a decline in the power of unions and rising importance is placed on transnational trade and laws. An interesting example of what has happened during this phase is the resurgence of Maoridom."

He says the golden age of the WEA was 1920-30 when it had institutional strength and a good relationship with universities and the government. He produces clippings from the Manawatu Evening Standard dated 18 May 1916 and 28 March 1933 showing the early years of the WEA in Palmerston North.

The 1916 article says:

"Workers' Educational Association

"A grant of £50 by the Palmerston North Borough Council has made possible the formation of a class belonging to the above Association. This Association was founded in Great Britain a few years ago with the object of bringing the workers into touch with the Universities. Already in the Old Country it has membership of 50,000 and in the last few months classes have been formed all over Australia and all the large centres of New Zealand. The classes, which consist of twenty members, choose their own subjects, listen to lectures delivered by their tutors and for an hour at the end of the lecture are allowed to criticise, ask questions, speak and generally take control. The proceedings are altogether democratic, non-political and calculated to cause the liveliest interest in the matters under discussion. The fee for a course of lectures if 5s, the rest of the money needed being provided by public grants and grants from the central governing authority, which consists of workers' and University representatives."

The 1933 article printed the entire annual report of the Palmerston North branch of the WEA!

From 1984 till now has been one of the most challenging periods for the WEA, though Merv says, its core objectives remain in tact.

"Deregulation, openness, competition and the commercial emphasis on education have made this phase very complex and seen a displacement of an interest in class to an interest in gender and culture. This has created some very real problems for the WEA and provoked many arguments and disputes."

However, the WEA remains responsive to the communities it works in and as an organisation has set about honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi/Treaty of Waitangi as the fundamental step in establishing a just and equitable society in Aotearoa New Zealand.

While many of the people who keep the WEA going are retired and/or volunteers, they have a lot of knowledge to pass on and, excitingly, they all believe they still have a lot to learn. ■

Auckland Workers Educational Association

The Auckland WEA aims to:

- Recognise the inequalities and injustices that exist within Aotearoa New Zealand society and promote a more just and equitable society.

- Regard honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi/Treaty of Waitangi as the fundamental step in establishing a just and equitable society in Aotearoa New Zealand.

- Promote rangatiratanga (sovereignty for the iwi).

- Challenge the racist nature of Pakeha society, particularly with regard to iwi.

- Advance the course of democracy and social justice by providing people with the information and skills to direct and improve their own lives.

Recent activities have included:

- Support of a public information day on Te Tiriti o Waitangi/Treaty of Waitangi issues;
- Support writing of a book on colonisation;
- Support of preparation of a learning package that critiques 'new right' ideology;
- Support of a women's building project.

The WEA has material intended to help people understand New Right ideology and its effects on Aotearoa New Zealand since the mid 1980s. This package was designed to support facilitate workshops and is available on the website: www.wea.org.nz/programmes/auckland.html download Neoliberal Workshop

The Treaty Resource Centre (TRC) was established in April 2004, under the auspices of the Auckland WEA as part of its recognition of the significance of Te Tiriti o Waitangi/Treaty of Waitangi.

A major aspect of recent New Zealand history has been the socio-political acknowledgement by the government and others of the significance of the Treaty. While some work is being done in relation to the past and its consequences today, there has been relatively little emphasis on consideration of the meaning of the Treaty today and in the future. TRC has been set up to promote application of the Treaty within Aotearoa New Zealand (in public, private and community sectors) and to locate our efforts here within an international context.

A te wa, a te wa

When Sandra Tapara's workplace suggested she attend a workshop about the Te Tiriti o Waitangi/Treaty of Waitangi she admits the only reason she agreed was "to make a change from my normal day's work!"

"I was very negative about being a New Zealand Maori in regards to the Treaty and I didn't believe I would learn anything, even though I really had no knowledge about the Treaty. I couldn't have been more wrong.

"There is a Maori saying 'a te wa, a te wa' – it will happen when it's meant to – and this was that time for me."

Sandra works for Goodman Fielder New Zealand at its factory in Wiri, South Auckland and the workshop was arranged by the Service and Food Workers Union (SFWU). It was part of an ongoing programme run by the Treaty Resource Centre (TRC) which was established in April 2004, as part of the Auckland WEA, in recognition of the significance of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

Sandra is a Maori of Tainui descent and she was raised in the Omanaia, Hokianga. She says before she took the Treaty workshop she felt she lacked knowledge about being a New Zealand Maori in regards to Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

"I learnt nothing in school or at home about the Treaty of Waitangi so I had no sense of what it was about. My upbringing was pretty much feeling there was the 'bloody Pakeha' and the 'poor Maori'.

"When I went into the workshop I saw Christine (Herzog, coordinator of the Treaty Resource Centre and facilitator of the workshop) and I admit I was very biased and I thought 'what's she doing taking a Treaty course, she's an American'!"

"I wish someone had told me to go in with an open mind because Christine was great and everybody loved her – she got through to everybody.

"She showed us this picture at the start of the workshop and it was of a wave and different people reacting to it. The first person was a woman looking in a well and she didn't even acknowledge the wave. There were other people in the picture – a tramper, a person on a cliff, someone in a helicopter, people collecting shellfish, someone in a boat and at the end an excited surfer riding the wave. But when she asked me which person I was, I was the one looking in the well and I had no interest in going any further."

As the workshop progressed Sandra suddenly connected with not only the course content, but with herself as a Maori woman.

"I've been so excited about it I've just been out there telling others to do something! I'm proud to be a New Zealander and to be a Maori and after doing this workshop I've started thinking about doing a Maori language course."

And Sandra has walked the talk. She was so impressed with the workshop she asked Christine to organise a second course for her friends and family which TRC was able to deliver for free in conjunction with Manukau Institute of Technology (MIT).

"I went again because I missed a lot the first time and was able to pick it up in the second session. I wanted to get my family into it because I feel this is something they need to know and Christine's presentation is awesome. A lot of New Zealanders just don't know about the Treaty.

"I'm so excited I want to get people out there buying Mana magazine and switching on to radio Waatea (Maori programmes) and Maori TV.

"I've signed up for the Maori party and I think it is a good time to start learning more, but I'm sorry I left it so late!"

Sandra is looking at doing Maori language courses through the WEA/TRC and she already speaks some Maori.

TRC was set up to consider the meaning of the Treaty today and in the future and its goals include promoting understanding of the Treaty throughout Aotearoa New Zealand, encouraging and assisting organisations to develop and implement Treaty-based policy and facilitate research which contributes to understanding of the Treaty and its application.

Thinking back to the beginning of her first workshop when she viewed the wave picture where is Sandra now?

"After Christine's passionate presentation, I'm riding the wave now. I'm feeling very adventurous in the sense that I'm talking more about being Maori and getting people interested in what it means to be tangata whenua."

After her workshop experience Sandra is passionate about the following quotation:

He Whakatauki
Te kotahitanga e tu toa e tu kaha ka puta ka ora
Te tu wehewehe ka hinga ka ngaro e kore ano e tu

New Right ideology explored

"Why on earth, you might well ask, does The Economist devote so much space to New Zealand, a tiny country of only 3.5m people....The answer quite simply is that the country merits it. Over the past decade or so, New Zealand has embraced more of the free market reforms that this newspaper espouses than any other industrial country."

(THE ECONOMIST, QUOTED IN JANE KELSEY [1] 1999, RECLAIMING THE FUTURE: NEW ZEALAND AND THE GLOBAL ECONOMY P.87)

Christine Herzog, long-time member of the Auckland WEA, was surprised to find when running workshops on Te Tiriti o Waitangi/ Treaty of Waitangi that many participants did not understand the economic philosophies of Aotearoa New Zealand.

She says that during the workshops people were starting to ask questions about the New Right, or Neo-Liberalism, and its implications, because it is touched on in the workshops, particularly in relation to the sale of New Zealand's state-owned assets.

"I was amazed that people had no sense whatsoever of how this ideology was affecting their lives, especially as many of the people in these workshops are very well educated. It wasn't really something we could cover adequately in the Treaty workshops, but the Auckland WEA felt there was a need to provide the information in some way," Christine says.

"The New Right is having a huge impact on New Zealand and our future generally, as well as relating to Treaty issues. It isn't the role of the WEA to tell people what to think, but we do believe people should have opportunities to become more aware so they can participate more effectively as citizens. There has been a huge philosophical shift in the world and we want to facilitate informed, robust discussion about it."

This type of project fits within the WEA commitment to strengthening democracy by providing contexts for discussion and public debate on current issues and by promoting participatory democracy and a 'knowledge active' society. The national WEA 10-year goal is "to work with other groups and organisations in building broad-based informed participation in decision-making with the aim of creating a sustainable world".

"We realised that since people didn't have any sense of the (New Right) philosophy, they weren't going to be queuing up to do courses about something they didn't know they didn't know! But we wanted to provide a resource that people could access easily once the questions came up," Christine says.

So, Auckland WEA commissioned the Kotare Trust to prepare a self-directed learning package intended to help people understand New Right ideology and its effects on Aotearoa New Zealand since the mid 1980s. The resource is designed to support facilitated workshops but does not require a tutor and individuals can use it independently. It is available on the website: www.wea.org.nz/programmes/auckland.html

Christine says that Kotare was commissioned to develop the learning package because it has particular expertise around economic literacy and fostering participatory education. It is a charitable trust set up in 1996 with the objectives of providing education and research for social change in relation to poverty, community economic development, and community work.

The document explores the neo-liberal arguments for trade liberalisation:

- The rule of the market
- Cutting public expenditure for social services
- Deregulation
- Privatisation
- Replacing the concept of "the public good" with "individual responsibility"

It looks at a timeline since 1984 and the introduction of Roger Douglas's economic philosophy, the selling off of State Owned Enterprises, the makeup of business power in New Zealand, and Aotearoa New Zealand in the international context.

"New Zealand is seen internationally as a social and economic experiment in relation to these ideas. It was considered one of the early adopters of the New Right ideology and has taken it on to a greater extreme than possibly any other country in the world. New Zealand has adopted it in a very literal sense and proceeded very quickly," Christine says.

"Ironically, at the turn from the 19th century to the 20th century, New Zealand was seen as being at the extreme edge of the spectrum with development of the welfare state. A century later we are at the extreme edge on other end of the spectrum."

[1] Jane Kelsey is the author of Rolling Back the state: privatisation of power in Aotearoa/New Zealand, The New Zealand Experiment, Reclaiming the Future: New Zealand and the Global economy, and At the Crossroads.

Waitakere City Workers Educational Association

Established in 1976, Waitakere WEA's aim has been to provide and encourage accessible and affordable adult and community education (ACE) within West Auckland to achieve a just, equitable and sustainable society. The WEA is based in a house at 9 Henderson Valley Road in Henderson, within walking distance of the railway station and main bus stops. The house is shared with Waitakere Adult Literacy and the two organisations have a close and complementary working relationship.

Waitakere WEA also works closely with the six community houses in Waitakere, the Anger Change Trust, other adult and community education providers and social service organisations. An agreement with Work and Income has allowed the WEA to provide ESOL and Life Skills for Beginners to refugees and new migrants.

The organisation takes a broad view of education and while courses and workshops make up our core business, Waitakere WEA sees the provision of advice and information and the encouragement of other projects with an ACE educational focus as being equally relevant.

For example, in the past year Waitakere WEA has been a member of two successful steering groups, one to establish community legal services in Waitakere City, and the other to set up the "ACE Space" – Waitakere Learning Shop. As a member of the Waitakere Employment and Skills project the organisation has collated a Directory of ESOL Provision in West Auckland and assisted in the establishment of an ESOL Tutor Training Network. As a long time member of the Waitakere City Road Safety Committee, Wai-takere WEA receives funding to provide Driver Education, including the training of trainers.

The course programme includes courses in the following areas:

- English for new migrants
- Te Reo Maori
- Driver education, including learner licencing
- Health, well-being and safety
- Personal development
- Community development
- Social and political issues

A free child minding service is available for most daytime courses and this is of huge benefit to the parents and caregivers who attend classes.

The average cost of a course is $2 per hour, though some training workshops cost a little more. The WEA is able to keep fees low because of the support of a number of schools that allocate tutor hours, an agreement with the Waitakere City Council and the support of other funding agencies.

Second chance a winner

It's a hot sunny day in West Auckland and life is moving slowly – it's January, holiday time and people are relaxed and happy. Looking out over the sprawling green villages that make up Waitakere city and chatting with the enthusiastic and animated Zieba Abedi, it's hard to believe this woman once feared for her life, fled her country and after six years of waiting, gained asylum in New Zealand.

When she arrived here with her husband Fahkrodin and two young sons four years ago, it was a massive challenge and a huge cultural change. After 40 days in a refugee centre, the family who escaped from Iran and spent six years in neighbouring Turkey, had to rebuild their lives.

"We came here with no English, no house, no friends and no understanding of the systems and the way things work. It was very hard for my husband to get a house because he couldn't negotiate with the agents. It was also difficult for us enrolling our two sons in the school. We wanted to know how they were doing and what they were learning but it was hard for us to understand. This was hard for me because I had been a school teacher," Zieba says.

Second chance a winner...

Zieba spoke two languages – Farsi and Turkish - taught art and her interests were painting, music and ballet. But after the revolution and political changes in Iran in the late 1970s and war through the 1980s such pursuits were banned.

The family lived in Turkey for six years, where Zieba was an interpreter and her husband a cook, while they sought asylum further afield.

"We went to Australia first, but I didn't like it as a place to raise my children. Then we came to New Zealand and I loved it straight away. It is very green and clean and the people are very nice."

As refugees the Abedis were put in touch with the Waitakere WEA to learn English through the free courses it runs on behalf of Work and Income.

"The WEA really helped Fahkrodin and myself to learn the language and to get our drivers' licences. The way they teach you is very encouraging which is quite different to the system of teaching we have come from."

Zieba says the WEA also assisted Fahkrodin and her with filling out all the forms they needed to settle in New Zealand and with getting the necessary letters of support.

Once her language skills improved and she could drive, Zieba was able to do a course to become a teacher aid and she was working at a nearby school until she and her husband started their own business. She hopes that as her language improves she will one day be able to retrain as a teacher and return to the profession she loves.

Many immigrants with English as a second or third language find it is sometimes better to start their own business rather than battle any language issues that might make employers think twice before employing them.

Fahkrodin and Zieba opened their own kebab shop, Sultan Kebabs, in the Royal Heights Shopping Centre in Massey a year ago. They have a few celebrity customers including Te Atatu MP Chris Carter and a well known model, as well as people they met when they first learned English at the WEA.

"There's a Colombian we did English with who has become a friend and a customer, as well as the very nice English teacher, Chandra Naidu and Dorothy (McGray) from the WEA."

But they found setting up a business wasn't easy. "We didn't know the system so we were waiting to get our papers to start up the business and we didn't know we had to go and apply for them.

"We were hoping to be up and running one month after taking over the shop lease but it took us four months. But always when you lose something, you win something. We lost money but we learned the language better and found lots of friends."

The Abedis work hard and the shop is open seven days a week for 12-14 hours a day. On busy afternoons and the weekends their sons help out, making it a truly family business. But Zieba doesn't mind hard work and her positive attitude has won admiration in the community and made her something of an inspiration to other new immigrants.

"We got given this opportunity and we are going to make the best of it. This is my home now. Our children are very happy here. My advice to other people in this situation is to be strong and learn the language as fast as you can. You can't hide at home, you have to go out and join in. The WEA was very good in helping us with this."

An example of Zieba's resilience and determination to adapt to her new environment is, with limited English skills, she joined the nearby Anglican church ladies' group and she says this helped her to learn about the culture.

"When you go to another country it is very important to first understand the culture. Otherwise you don't know if you are doing things right or if you are upsetting people. These ladies were very nice to me and helped me a lot."

Zieba makes me a lamb kebab. The Abedis pride themselves on the cleanliness of their shop and the freshness and appetising look of their food. Fahkrodin packages his own Turkish delight and baklava and sells it to supermarkets.

I've eaten lots of kebabs in my time and this one is truly delicious, up with the best. People wander past and greet Zieba. The customers out for a late lunch all know her. Her two boys sit outside chatting with friends. The sun is baking, the view is spectacular and on this day anyway, it's easy to see how Zieba believes she has in fact, landed in paradise. ■

Creating a ripple effect

Miriam de Jong's own life journey, through immigration from the Netherlands, a marriage breakup, raising three children and trying to understand her Jewish family history, has given her empathy for others struggling to connect all aspects of their increasingly busy and demanding lives.

"On my own journey I've found my niche. I've looked at all aspects of counselling and gone through counselling myself. I found that instead of wanting to become a counsellor, I want to facilitate groups that help people with personal development," Miriam says.

In the last term of 2004 she ran a daytime Positive Parenting course for the Waitakere WEA. Positive Parenting (P5) is a community-based course to develop parenting skills and is an area that has interested her for some time. This year (2005) Miriam will run an evening course for the WEA, as well as one during the day.

Miriam's association with the Waitakere WEA began 10 years ago when her marriage of 23 years ended and she took up yoga classes at its base in Henderson, West Auckland. As she got to know the centre and liked the friendliness of the people involved with it, she became interested in more courses and went to do Positive Parenting.

This piqued her interest in facilitating such courses and so she trained as a facilitator through the WEA and also did outside facilitator training, including as a Youthline counsellor.

She started running Self Esteem and Personal Development courses at the WEA and when one of the other facilitators left, she grabbed the opportunity to lead Positive Parenting courses. She has run a similar programme for other organisations and has incorporated her other learning into the programme.

The WEA course runs for eight weeks, two hours a week, and Miriam says the biggest breakthrough is getting parents to understand themselves, why they behave the way they do around their children and the chain reaction that their behaviour can start.

"People really get to look at their own belief system and as they go through the course they look at the importance of communication. A lot of work is done around communication skills and people often find when they have a partner, they slowly start to communicate better with their partner as well."

The courses attract parents from across the spectrum, including men and women referred by Child, Youth and Family or the courts.

"A lot of parents out there are lost. Society puts on so much pressure and there is no value placed on being a parent. Parents have to work and children are suffering," Miriam says.

"I feel I have a lot to offer because I had a very difficult upbringing myself and it hasn't been easy with my own children. But I look at them now as adults and start to see that I've done an OK job. People pick up that I've been through these things and they feel they can trust me."

Miriam says the Waitakere WEA runs many different courses which are subsidised and run during the day as well as in the evening, so money and time can't always be excuses for people not to take up something new and challenging.

"I believe the WEA plays a big part in the community by providing so many different courses. The committee is always looking for courses that will help the community. There is a crèche so that parents can attend courses, which is a great service.

"I love being associated with the WEA – the organisation is easy to work with, flexible and people always take time when I need to debrief."

Miriam was born in Israel to Dutch parents who had survived World War II. When her parents divorced, she went with her mother to the Netherlands. Later in life she has discovered that the way her parents coped with those terrible years as teenagers was to ignore the trauma they felt, work hard and get on with life. She says they rarely spoke of the war years. She believes this is a coping mechanism many people in conflict use, but it is not always effective.

Her mother eventually told her about going into hiding in Holland; she was 12 when the war broke out and she was Jewish. "She was a very free spirited child so that would have been awful for her. And when the war ended and her whole family had survived she was constantly told how lucky she was, which made her guilty. My father was the only survivor from his family.

"Through my work with Youthline, every year we go for a weekend to a marae and this got me thinking about my own ancestors and slowly opened me up to learning about them.

"I've joined a second generation group of Jewish children of Holocaust survivors which has helped me to understand my parents and to understand me. When you look at what happened to my parents in the war, there was no way their marriage was going to survive. They had post-traumatic stress they never dealt with and there is a whole generation of children raised by people like this."

Miriam says she never saw her birth father after her mother left Israel, but 12 years ago she took her family to Holland for six months and she was able to go to Israel to see him. He has re-married and she met her half-brother and half-sister for the first time. She was able to visit him again briefly last year on another trip to Holland.

"I have a real passion for the facilitating work I do and like to think it creates some kind of ripple effect in the community. When I get overwhelmed by what is happening in the world I make sure I smile at people; that I have time for people and I really listen to them and I hope that maybe that will be a light in someone's life."

Manawatu Workers Educational Association

Based in Palmerston North, the Manawatu WEA focuses on non-partisan political, social and economic programmes. There is evidence of WEA meetings held in Palmerston North as early as 1919, five years after the organisation first began in New Zealand. A revival in 1985 was initiated by social worker, consultant and researcher Mervyn Hancock.

Honouring the Treaty has been a priority. During the heightened awareness of Treaty issues leading up to the 1990,150 year commemoration of its signing, four talks attracted average attendances of 150 people. Manawatu WEA has also developed a partnership with tangata iwi through Te Whare Akonga and its raranga/weaving Maori literacy project.

For specific programmes, Manawatu WEA has developed partnerships with other community education providers, including Project Waitangi, the city library and art gallery, trade unions, Massey University, ARLA and ESOL, and the Palmerston North city council.

A Local History group, formed in 1991 to encourage residents to explore the history of their street, suburb, and community groups, is now an autonomous organisation. The WEA then moved on to give life to new initiatives in learning. For example, six lunchtime talks on "What is Islam?" led by members of the local Muslim Association and held at the height of the post-September 11 headlines in 2002, attracted significant support,

Rather than hold the traditional classes in personal development and cultural and arts activities, it was agreed that the Manawatu WEA would focus on public talks on "economic, social and political" education. It prides itself on maintaining this focus today.

Individual union members were active in the early years and some courses were held in association with the Trade Union Education Authority (TUEA).

Political changes and the weakening of the unions led to the WEA reviewing its goals and vision in 2001. While retaining its original focus, Manawatu WEA recognised that "the new working class was those without paid work, living on deficit income and trapped by poverty". It decided activities need to reflect a community where gaps between "haves" and "have-nots" is still a reality. A charge of $2 remains the cost for a session of any public series.

A full programme was made possible through the provision of a part-time paid worker from 1986 to1994. Since 1994, and the government cuts to FWEA, a collective of volunteers has maintained a reduced programme.

The challenge for today's collective is to "hand on the torch" of the WEA vision of learning to tomorrow's leaders in lifelong learning.

Bi-cultural experience builds mutual respect

Te Whare Akonga - Open Learning Centre is a community resource and as such, the venue and its resources are available for community use.

Opened in 1991, it provides free literacy, language and learning support for primarily low income people either in a group situation, on a one-to-one basis, or self-paced learning. It is a key site for multi cultural interaction in Palmerston North and is open from 9am to 5pm weekdays.

The drivers' licence programme enables learners to access space, resources, information and advocacy if required, for 48 weeks of the year.

A women's writing group allows women in transition to expand their horizons through publishing writings collectively and/or individually. It raises awareness of and celebrates issues pertinent to women and includes a performing arm – The Flying Fishwives.

Maori Literacy offers an alternative way of accessing literacy and numeracy skills in the context of raranga/weaving of harakeke/flax, korowai/cloaks and tukutuku/lattice work panels. Raranga is initially about planning and decision making, for example, weaving a kete or korowai. To create a kete or korowai you need to count as the whenu, or strips, dictate the length, height and width of the article. The literacy component kicks in when the article is completed. Learners usually have a story to tell and they are encouraged to physically write it. Raranga is also used as a tool for self development and it can draw out the unique creativity of the individual.

The partnership between Manawatu WEA and Te Whare Akonga - Open Learning Centre has been an ongoing experience of building relationships for more than a decade. These days, Te Whare Akonga - Open Learning Centre is "home" to the Manawatu WEA branch, providing space for monthly meetings, including the AGM and some of the educational and informational talks. It shares resources and takes care of finances and administration tasks.

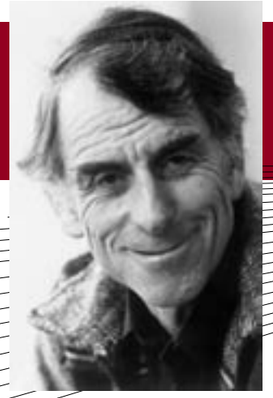
Manawatu WEA has supported the raranga programme since it began; many thanks to the members who had the foresight to honour the Treaty of Waitangi in its 'wholisity'. The bi-cultural partnership allowed the gradual development of this programme to expand to marae-based wananga locally and regionally, ensuring the concepts of tino rangatiratanga, whanaungatanga, kawanatanga and manaakitanga continue to flourish.

WEA's financial support for the Aotearoa National Weavers Hui 2003 ensured the success of this venture, considered to be the biggest to date. It was held in conjunction with the launch of the Wearable Maori Heritage Show. Both events were a first for Palmerston North.

Acknowledgement also goes to WEA for continuously supporting Adult Learners' Week He Tangata Mā Tauranga by providing book tokens for the nominees, facilitating, organising guest speakers, submitting media releases and a myriad of other things.

Te Whare Akonga - Open Learning Centre and Manawatu WEA complement each other by the absolute respect and acceptance of each for the other and we know that we have forged a truly bi-cultural relationship.

Commitment to civic education



An understanding working wife has enabled John Thornley to follow his heart into voluntary education work and maintain his long association with the Manawatu WEA.

With his wife Dr Gillian Thornley, a lecturer in mathematics at Massey University, John lives, writes, teaches and learns in Palmerston North. He credits his wife for freeing him from the "9-5 work life" and enabling him to devote time to education and community work.

John has spent more than 40 years as an educator in both formal and community learning, in paid and voluntary work. He graduated from Victoria University with a Masters degree in English history in 1961 and went on to Teachers' College in Christchurch. He worked as a teacher until 1967 when he traveled to the West Indies for two years.

Spending time in the West Indies as part of a Student Christian Movement, John relished the native people's unique music style, calypso. Noted for its lyrics, which are usually improvised and often humorous and ironic, calypso music is backed by the distinctive sound of the steel drum.

John loves all kinds of music but really took to legendary Jamaican reggae man Bob Marley and calypso king The Mighty Sparrow (Slinger Francisco). He has shared his interest in popular music in workshops, talks and at events for 20 years with two WEA highlights being a tent set up in Palmerston North's Square in 1987 to mark Bob Marley Day, 11 May, and his 50th birthday talk about Bob Dylan in 1991, attended by more than 100 people.

"I'm not a musician but I tell stories through music, it's a sort of narrative therapy. It's an effective tool though it only goes so far in the end. It's the glue that gives feelings of solidarity and energises individuals, but for any real change, you need strong organisation and the hard grind to work for achievable goals," John says.
He publishes the bi-annual journal Music in the Air which expresses his interest in and vast knowledge of music from the 1920s, right up to today's rap and hip hop.

When John returned from the West Indies to New Zealand he eventually settled in Wellington and in the early 1970s, while working for a book publisher, he became involved in WEA.

"WEA ran summer schools at Rathkeale College in Masterton, as well as lunch time lectures, mostly on liberal social and political issues of interest to the community. I have strong memories of the summer schools and of enjoying and dancing to Marley's music during recreation time."

When John's wife got a job at Massey University and they moved to Palmerston North in 1980, he got involved with the WEA there.

"Gillian has been the breadwinner and has freed me from the 9-5pm work routine. I've spent some time as the house husband cooking the meals and doing the vacuuming and all those jobs no one likes doing. This has given me the opportunity to work in the voluntary sector. Unfortunately, the way everyone has to live now, they are so exhausted just surviving they don't have much energy left for volunteer work."

He says one of the big changes in his life came when he entered into the world of Adult and Community Education (ACE). He worked part time and was paid as the WEA co-ordinator from 1986-1994, when Government funding to WEAs was cut. Since then, a collective of volunteers has kept the WEA running, including John who is the secretary. He does other voluntary work as well, both in ACE, social services and with the Methodist church.
"I was motivated to pick up the organisational work with the WEA because of the great freedom and flexibility of the job. People who come to the WEA do so because they have a passion for learning about themselves and the world.

"I also appreciate the apolitical side of the WEA. We talk about issues of the moment and try to look at critical policies from central and local government. While the slant is on the liberal side, we will criticise any political party, whatever its colours.

"It is important to have freedom to probe more deeply the ideologies that underpin politics. It can either make you feel powerful, or powerless. The WEA are great talkers, but some action does come of it. You can find like-minded people and get together a submission, at the local body or national government level.

"The Manawatu has always had a strong commitment to civic education. We try to be a bridge between the technocrats' jargon and the lay person to let them know what is happening. The emphasis is on how to relate the knowledge to the experience of the people. We've held series on the ownership of power and energy supplies, the privatisation of health services, and sustainability in the home setting. It's about giving the ordinary citizen a chance to have their say and a little more control of their lives.

"Finally, there's a social side. With many older people and beneficiaries living alone, it provides an opportunity to come away from the isolation of home, to stimulate their mind and share ideas with others.

"And, to have fun; after all, what's the point of learning if it's not enjoyable?" ■

Kapiti Coast Workers Educational Association

Started in 1977, the Kapiti WEA has progressed to one of the very active organisations in New Zealand.

A non-profit making incorporated society, the Kapiti Coast WEA promotes ideals of a just, equitable and sustainable society through the medium of education.

Adult education is booming on the Kapiti Coast and this has been a key to the unprecedented interest in the WEA. It aims to make courses accessible to all, but particularly to the high number of retired people living in the Kapiti area. Rather than focusing on gaining qualifications, the emphasis is on open entry, no examinations and low cost cooperative learning.

Courses cover the arts, literature, health and wellbeing, language, history and culture, science and environment, gardening, food, the world, personal growth and development, global matters and events or policies affecting the Kapiti Coast.

With water conservation being an important issue on the Coast, the WEA, in cooperation with the Kapiti Coast Development Council and local trades people and professionals, has looked at offering some answers towards a sustainable solution to the area's water issues.

The Kapiti Coast WEA is run by a committee of volunteers and one paid staff member – the administrator. The committee acts as convener for the courses as well as supporting the work of the administrator through sub-committees dealing with issues of membership, publicity and funding.

A future in the stars

You won't see your future in the stars, but you might see the history and future of the universe if you learn what to look for, according to astronomer Frank Andrews.

The senior education officer at the Carter Observatory in Wellington until he retired recently, Frank fascinates Kapiti Coasters with his courses in astronomy at the WEA in Waikanae.

"But I don't go around looking at the entrails of a chicken or into a crystal ball to predict the future. One of the reasons I teach astronomy is so that people can learn what it is and that it's NOT astrology!" he says. "I believe that the universe is extremely beautiful in its structures and the interrelationships (usually expressed through mathematics) which guide its existence at all size levels and times. Sharing the appreciation of this beauty with others always gives me great pleasure. It's a little like sharing an appreciation of great works of art or music."

And people are keen to know "what's out there" and why.

"People do have a fascination with what's beyond earth. I go on holiday to a camping ground in the Coromandel and I usually take a telescope. The first time I did it I had about 50 people wanting to take a look so I started running evening sessions with people in the camping ground. Hearing their reaction when they first see Saturn or the moon is wonderful. I've carried on doing this now for many years," he says.

"These are not often academics, just ordinary people and kids who wanted the chance to look through a telescope and see the craters on the moon, the Orion nebula and Saturn's rings for themselves. There is a huge latent interest in the community and it is a wonderful science to be involved with either as an amateur, or a professional."

Frank's own fascination began when he was about two. According to his mother, he started asking questions about the moon and the stars pretty much right from the start. He started reading about them as soon as he could, some time around age four.

His education included a science degree in mathematics and physics which has helped with his interest in astronomy, but when he studied there was no specialist degree programme in the area that has captivated him his whole life. However, he read and studied everything he could about astronomy and he has developed many affiliations in the science worldwide. He was consulted through the observatory and is a member of a worldwide group of astronomers. He is in constant contact with the most recent thinking and discovery in the field and in his courses draws on slides from NASA's Hubble space telescope, some of which he has been involved in interpreting.

"New Zealand is a very handy longitude and I have been able to follow a few variable stars, which vary in brightness, and have confirmed them. But I don't call it a 'discovery'. I like to think of it as contributing to the body of knowledge", Frank says, "This is all anyone can ever hope to do.

"I watch the night sky for sheer enjoyment, but it is a science and I use the observations I make. I have access to big telescopes when I need them. After six months or so all observations are usually shared because this is not a business with profit and loss. While there is competition and often a certain amount of contention over who is right and wrong, there is a lot of cooperation. One person in their lifetime really only scratches the surface of what's out there.

"An amateur telescope worth having would be hard to find under $2000, but really, if you had the money, you could spend $200 million or more, there really is no upper limit. This is why professional astronomers are dependant on governments and universities for their equipment. Amateurs find that if they look after a good telescope it doesn't lose its value and the only time they are usually sold is when someone is trading up to something bigger. I think they are a great investment!"

The WEA approached Frank in 1993 to take courses and he says he has always been interested in passing on what he knows and what he has learned in his "65 and a half" years on Planet Earth.

"It's enjoyable to be able to share my own enthusiasm and it is always rewarding to see other people get something out of the science. A lot of the lectures/discussions I do grow out of the work I'm doing at the time."

Frank says "anybody with an interest in learning about the universe" can attend his courses and they attract people from school age to their 90s and everyone in between.

"I get people from all walks of life – dentists, doctors, grocers, people who drive trucks and taxis etc. and I've helped start a number of kids off in professional careers in astronomy. One is in charge of one of the biggest telescopes in the world in South Africa and others are scattered all around the world.

"The WEA is an outstanding organisation and it contributes a great deal to society. It brings further education to people who otherwise couldn't get it. A lot of kids don't value education in school but the WEA gives them a second chance later on. It is never too late to study and I know people who have completed PhD degrees in retirement!

"One of the things I try and do with the courses I teach is get people interested in further more formal study. I have a lot of links in science so can guide people on how to best get back into the education system.

The question I've been dying to ask since the beginning of this interview is of course, 'Is there life out there?' Expecting to be shot down by the exactness of science, I'm surprised when Frank says: "While life, intelligent or otherwise, has not yet been detected beyond the Earth, it is virtually certain that it exists.

"It is almost a certainty that life will be discovered with currently planned advances in astronomical instruments and technology on earth and in space within 20 or 30 years. From what we now know about the origins of life here on our planet it seems that life will come into existence where ever conditions are suitable. The conditions that gave rise to our planet are certainly not uncommon! Intelligence is undoubtedly much rarer than life itself.

"In the universe there are more stars than grains of sand on earth and human beings have been on earth less than one millionth of the time the earth has existed," Frank says.

"Logic would suggest that there could be another million planets like earth out there in our galaxy at various stages in their development that will, at some point include life of some sort with intelligence. It just might not be while we are enjoying our 1 millionth of the time on our planet.

"There is a big SETI (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence) programme worldwide – everyone is looking to find signs of intelligent life in the universe beyond earth."

Would Frank like to be out there looking? Definitely!

"I was born a generation too soon," he says. "I would go if I got half a chance but I don't think my wife would let me!"

Video course benefits more than one class

A digital video course run by the Kapiti Coast WEA has given high school teacher Robyn Keeling knowledge and experience to pass on to the students she teaches.

The head of IT and media studies at Horowhenua College in Levin, she says there is a practical component in the NCEA media studies course that involves students who choose to study film, producing a video.

"The WEA course provided lots of information and covered all aspects of video production, including equipment, lighting, camera angles, writing a script and story boarding," Robyn says.

"It gave me hands-on experience which is always valuable.

"I took extensive notes all the way through and produced handouts which I gave to the rest of the group and which I will be modifying to use in the classroom."

Robyn says she didn't previously know anything about the WEA but she was "keen to do anything that would help me in my line of work". Other members of the Kapiti Video Camera Club she belongs to had done the digital video course and spoke highly of it, so when a second group signed up, Robyn joined them.

Part of the course involved making a one minute video in a group and Robyn worked with Mike Wilson and Myra Wootton, other members of the club.

"We worked very well as a group because we were all there to learn. We all came with different experiences and backgrounds but we were able to learn from each other and bounce ideas off each other."

Mike Wilson says he joined the course as a "semi-professional" video maker to try and recoup some money on what has become an "extremely expensive hobby".

"I started with a video camera about 20 years ago and got carried away. I'll never buy a set of golf clubs because I'll probably want to purchase the course. I tend to really throw myself into these things," he says.

He says making the 60 second video in a group was an extremely worthwhile experience in learning to work to a brief. He says because of the tight timeframe, both to produce the video and in the length of the production, the team worked together well.

"I tend to be quite pushy and vocal and if I've got something to say, I want to say it. But I found that didn't happen. It was a compromise situation and we really had to work together to make it work."

Mike also relished the chance to hear about life as a professional video maker, from tutor Ted Boorer. He runs his own video production company based in Paraparaumu.

"While he was teaching us have gave us an insight to how he worked and I did benefit from that.

"This course really whetted my appetite and made me aware there is a lot more to learn and I'll be enrolling in another course. The WEA course was an opportunity to learn a lot and learn it fast and inexpensively. WEA courses are a good stepping stone for going back into more formal tertiary education."

Myra Wootton says she enjoyed all aspects of the course, but is particularly keen on script writing. She used to belong to New Zealand Playwrights and has had her plays performed.

She liked being able to inject some humour into the group's 60 second video, which was a promotion for the WEA. It involved a woman going off to lots of WEA courses and leaving her hapless husband standing alone in the driveway, wondering who was going to cook his lunch. In the final scene the woman is looking to enroll her husband in WEA cooking classes so he can in fact, make his own lunch.

Myra says she got a video camera when she retired. "A lot of people buy cameras to go on trips or record holidays but I have always been interested in making documentaries."

She says she got a lot out of the seven week WEA course and found the discipline of a 60 second production enlightening.

"It made us appreciate what goes into advertisements. I learnt a lot of professional tips, particularly on interviewing techniques."

Myra says while her two partners handled the technical side, she wrote the script and did the acting, which she never expected.

"That was an insight for me as I discovered what it was like to be directed over the finest details and to get the piece as concise as possible to fit into the time allowed," Myra says.

Tutor Ted Boorer says he likes to be able to pass on professional tips during the course.

"I don't sit down and lecture people; it's very hands on in the class and if we are talking about a camera, or sound, or lighting, everyone gets involved and has a go," he says.

"Shooting nice pictures is one thing, being able to tell a story is another. So we look at how to frame, lighting and sound and all the things that are important to get a good production.

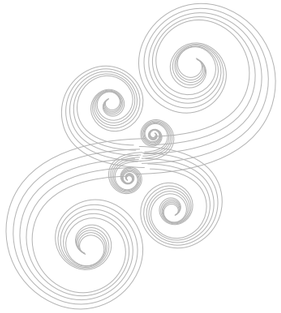
"Most people buy a video camera and shoot a whole lot of stuff then don't know what to do with it. I teach them to put those pictures into some sort of order to tell a story."

"Shooting nice pictures is one thing, being able to tell a story is another. So we look at how to frame, lighting and sound and all the things that are important to get a good production."

Hutt City Workers Educational Association

Hutt City WEA offers many informal courses to develop personal and social development.

There is a broad range of courses covering food, health, finance, house and garden, music, leisure pursuits, travel, training, languages, computers, personal development, alternative incomes, art, design and craft, hands on activities such as furniture restoration and wood work, and reading and writing.



Some responses to recent courses from students include:

"Tutor had delightful manner, spoke very soundly on her subject and involved everyone to participate."

"Challenged my thinking, offering new concepts on a practical basis."

"It was FUN and my project looked great – courses are value for money."

"Very satisfying tutor – very approachable. Good to do something not offered elsewhere."

Life stories treasured

Everyone has a unique life story to tell, according to novelist, playwright and teacher Renée.

Renée helps people create a record of their lives, or a significant event in their lives, with a memoir writing course for Hutt City WEA once a year.

"Anyone can write their own story because it is their life and they are their own primary source," Renée says.

"It's good that we all have unique voices and I often say to people, you can't leave recording everything to the historians, they don't know our lives. Our society is a patchwork of different stories and if a patch is missing, it is not a full patchwork."

Experience in writing is not necessary and the course covers crafting writing skills, including tips on structure, shaping, placement and sequence and there are exercises during the sessions. While the exercise writing is shared, the memoirs remain confidential.

Called "Your Life, Your Story", the course involves 1½ hour sessions once a week for five weeks and outside that time, participants write whichever part of their life story they want to. They send their work to Renée and she edits it for them. This process can go on for some time after the course ends.

"Mainly people want to leave some sort of record of their life for family and friends to treasure. And it is a real treasure," Renée says.

"Sometimes they send me a finished piece which they've had bound in some way and I get a real thrill out of that. I remain friends with just about everyone who does the course.

"I never cease to be amazed by people who say to me, 'I've led a very ordinary life', but they haven't. We are very good at understatement in New Zealand and don't see ourselves as having lived lives of any significance at all."

Renée says she did a workshop for the WEA for the first time in the 1980s in Auckland. "I like the (organisation's) principles and the basis on which it has been built, so I have kept on doing courses."

She says she gets out of it what every teacher gets: "Mutual two-way pleasure in discussing writing or solving problems. It is wonderful to see people blossom and learn that they can write; I get pleasure out of that."

Renée's courses are strictly limited to 10 and participants can benefit from the experiences of a well respected and published writer.

Born in Napier, of Ngati Kahungunu and Irish-English-Scots ancestry, Renée has worked in woollen mills, a printing factory, a grocery-dairy, and as a feature writer and reviewer. She completed a BA at the University of Auckland in 1979 and started writing for the stage at the age of 50. A prolific playwright, her most successful work is a trilogy of historical plays about four generations of working-class women – *Wednesday to Come* – making a return season to Downstage in June, 2005 - *Pass it On* and *Jeannie Once.*

Renée has also written short stories and novels and she was the 1989 Burns Fellow. Attached to the Department of English at Otago University the Robert Burns Fellowship aims to encourage and promote imaginative New Zealand literature. Recently she was awarded the Randell Cottage Residency for 2005. This is a six-month residency at the historic Randell Cottage in Thorndon, Wellington with a stipend from Creative New Zealand.

Renée tutors graduate creative writing students at Whitireia Polytech and also runs courses for the Cancer Society and in 2005 is tutoring a playwright's course for Playmarket in Wellington.

Getting creative with employment

Hutt City WEA tutor Ruth O'Grady says a number of people who have attended her sculpting and jewellery making courses have gone on to create their own art-based businesses, or take a new employment direction.

"Quite a lot of them have progressed to producing goods to sell and one woman has started quite a large full-time jewellery business," Ruth says.

"One retired gentleman did a couple of classes in sculpting Oamaru stone and he is producing and selling work and is doing very well. He had no background in the arts at all, but it is something he wanted to try.

"Most people do have trepidation and a lack of confidence. There are a lot of myths about art and creativity. The biggest myth is that you are born arty; you're not! Like anything else, art involves learned skills. Once people learn the skills they can apply them in a whole lot of ways. Any one can be creative."

Ruth has been running classes for Hutt City WEA for seven years and she also runs adult education classes at Wellington High School. An artist herself, she has a shop in Wellington's seaside suburb of Island Bay, called Koru. She sells her own work, as well as other New Zealand artists and says many of the people who attend her classes end up selling through Koru as well.

"The WEA runs a good range of courses in the creative fields and is quite proactive in sourcing new and interesting areas. The courses are quite cost effective and the programme is really working because they get people from all over the Wellington region, not just the Hutt."

Ruth says one of her more popular workshops is one day on sculpting Oamaru stone.

"It's a one day workshop but a lot of people come back and do it several times through a year. In a day they can produce something and if they like it, it is the sort of thing they can do at home.

"Oamaru stone is a medium everyone can do. I've worked in various media and I wouldn't say that about every medium. It's hands on and people enjoy that process of working with stone and creating something. Everything is provided and at the end of the day they have a small sculpture to take home or give as a gift.

"New Zealand is a very creative country and New Zealanders will have a go and things. We have an appreciation of what's readily available on our doorstep and of making things with that."

Ruth says New Zealand jewellery is very popular commercially and a number of people who have done Hutt City WEA jewellery classes are selling their work well.

"These courses can give people a new direction and new earning potential. They can be a catalyst to discovering a talent they didn't realise they had. It's very satisfying (as the tutor) to see people discovering their creativity and overcoming the myths and the blocks they have.

"We go through a time when we aren't encouraged to be creative. But after primary school, which is very creative, the focus of secondary school is on 'serious' subjects and the visual arts are not as highly valued. Yet I believe the arts overlap learning in all subjects and could be used to make a lot of material more accessible."

Ruth says people from all walks of life attend both the jewellery and sculpting courses, aged from late teens to early 60s.

"People are looking to get new skills and particularly the women enjoy learning in a group. They say they learn more in a group than alone because they learn off each other and get to see a whole range of things being done that they wouldn't have thought of themselves."

Wellington Workers Educational Association

Lunchtime forums open debate

Wellington WEA is a group of volunteers who contribute to the education of adults in Wellington by running lunchtime forums and other activities that provide opportunities for discussion and debate on important local and national issues.

The Monday forums are held at the Betty Campbell Centre in the Harbour City Tower on Panama St, Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington from 12.10-1pm and attendance and interest levels are high. They are held on a regular basis, are open to all and entry is by koha.

Wellington WEA president Rodney Murphy says the WEA has access to good speakers who create high interest and good attendance.

"We have a very good reputation and there is an informality that involves questions and comment; something that everyone appreciates. When potential speakers are rung and asked to speak at the WEA we get a good response. People like speaking to the Wellington WEA," Rodney says.

"The thing I notice looking around the audience is that for some people, it is a haven. It's not necessarily educational, but social; at the same time they are learning. Some people come because they like the connection with the community."

Rodney says Wellington WEA works on three terms in the year and each term is devoted to a new subject. The first term this year starts with "The Pacific Paradise Lost" - about our Pacific neighbours. Being an election year, term two will focus on election issues.

Wellington WEA runs a study group once a month on Thursday. The group meets for an hour and a half to discuss current affairs or focus on a theme, often suggesting a theme for future forums.

WEA also stages lectures at Sprott House retirement home in Karori for the residents and any other senior citizens who want to attend.

"This was started up by Marie Holgate 17 years ago. Her mother was in Sprott House and Marie decided life was pretty dull for her mother with few intellectual activities to keep her going. So she started these sessions on Wednesday from 10-12.30pm and she does a wonderful job."

Rodney says after Government cuts in the 1990s Wellington WEA diminished considerably and it is now run on an entirely voluntary basis. However, he says the branch does still offer valuable insight to issues affecting the local community and New Zealand and the global community at large.

Rodney joined the WEA in 1984 after leaving the Anglican Ministry which included being chaplain at Avalon TV Studios. A friend suggested he look at classes run by the WEA and he was hooked, later getting involved on the committee and running courses.

He has twice been president, once in the late 1980s before he left Wellington, and later after his return to Wellington he served on the committee and then as President.

He says the basic reasons people become involved in the WEA remain the same, despite the "downsizing" of the Wellington WEA.

"People come for three reasons. One, they want to learn something, two, they want to get out of the house and three, they want to make new friends. They are all valid reasons and that's what adult education is about, making it work in the community.

"We must be doing something right, as our membership is rising."

Canterbury Workers Educational Association

Established in 1915, the Canterbury WEA is a non-profit, voluntary, adult education association which aims to provide education for personal growth and towards the establishment of a just and equitable society.

Based at 59 Gloucester St, Christchurch, the CWEA is organised and run by its members, some of whom work as volunteers on committees and in the office. Membership is open to all.

Courses offered by the CWEA are affordable, and of a high standard. Through courses, talks and forums the CWEA provides opportunities for people to come together in a friendly atmosphere to learn something new, listen, discuss and have fun. CWEA is not linked to any political or religious groups. CWEA offers a range of courses in arts and crafts, current affairs and local issues, economics and politics, the environment, history, house and garden, literature, music, personal development, travel, recreation and Maori/Treaty issues. It also organises lectures, forums and seminars on topical national or international issues in response to ideas and events in the community.

The North West Branch of the Canterbury WEA independently runs its own very successful programme of weekly talks from the Bishopdale Community Centre.

Canterbury tales

Creative writing tutor Helen Hogan offers her students something every writer wants, the opportunity to publish their short stories.

She has been running creative writing courses for the Canterbury WEA for five years and while her students generally come to classes for pleasure, not profit from their words, she has developed a way for them to work together as a group, write and be published.

"We publish our own books but they aren't just ordinary books," Helen says. "We work together on an activity and everyone contributes. One idea involved basically knocking down the WEA and building the Gloucester Hotel in its place on Gloucester St in Christchurch. We imagined that the hotel was built in 1935 and we drew up what it would look like. Then we allocated rooms to each person on the course and they had to write about a person staying in that room on the Friday that was show day in Christchurch that year, I think it was 1990.

"One student created, for her room, a man coming to steal a famous painting from a well-known Christchurch art gallery and this character needed some accomplices. She needed the cooperation of the students writing about the accomplices to guarantee that their people would be in the hotel bar at 6pm that night so her character could meet them. That way we got to know each other's characters and it was enormously good fun!"

Another book involved a scenario where a bus traveling from Picton to Christchurch was trapped by a landslide after an earthquake. The passengers were forced by circumstances to stay in a farm house with one woman living there and each student wrote a story about one of the people on the bus. Helen says while the books are published, they are only sold among the WEA members and the writers tend to use them as gifts for family and friends.

"Another interesting book involved each writer creating a character who had a passion for the next character in the book, working around in a circle. There were 11 writers and an uneven number of men and women characters so it looked like there needed to be a homosexual or lesbian relationship, which none of them wanted to tackle. But we did not have to confine ourselves to romantic love.

"The way it worked out was the first character was a boy with downs syndrome who worked in a supermarket bringing in the trolleys. He thought he was in love with one of the customers and that particular story was very delicately and beautifully written. The 11th character was a policeman who was loved by a woman he would have married, but he had two loyalties preventing that. One was his loyalty to the police force, which she objected to and the other was he had promised his parents he would care for his brother with downs syndrome. That brotherly love was how we got the two males together."

Helen is a skilled story teller and she joins in the classes by writing her own short stories. Each writer reads their work to the group and it is discussed in a supportive way. In fact, she is a well-known published writer. As a lecturer in English at the former Christchurch Teachers' College, she has written two text books and edited a number of children's poetry anthologies.

When she retired in 1983 she returned to Canterbury University to study te reo Maori (Maori language), particularly written Maori.

"I felt it was something I ought to do as a New Zealander but found it difficult to find the time during my working career. After I'd done the language papers it seemed silly not to continue on as I'd spent so much time on it and was enjoying it so much. I had two MAs (History and English) so decided to do a PhD in Maori and I graduated at the age of 72."

Her thesis involved translating Maori accounts of their journeys as found in Maori journals and manuscripts written between 1840 and 1914. She has written books based on these, including *Renata's Journey* and *Hikurangi to Homburg.*

"It's very difficult for me to remember when I first had anything to do with the WEA because I'm very old (81) and the WEA is very old (90 in New Zealand), but I can remember going to lectures as far back as the 1940s.

"About 10 years ago I was asked to run a literature course studying short stories and then it was suggested I series of lectures on Maori journeys. I eventually ran out of journeys so they asked me to run the creative writing courses."

Her students are so enthusiastic about the courses that when she had a back operation and it looked like she may have to postpone classes for a while, her students all agreed to join her at her home to continue their course rather than miss out.

She runs a beginner's course on Mondays and a more advanced course on Wednesdays, for two hours over four, eight week terms. The advanced writers enroll term after term and Helen says she has seen some very good writers develop in the five years she has been teaching, including one who has won short story competitions.

Helen types up the student's stories and organises the publishing. She also does sketches to illustrate the book but modestly says this is "just for fun, I have no real skills in this area".

She has had some health problems but there's no stopping a devoted writer and teacher. "I think the person who gets most out of it is me! It forces me to write every week and the one thing I've always cared about as a parent and teacher was being able to watch people grow and develop and I get that.

"My belief is if you want to write, whether commercially or for your own satisfaction and you want to improve, there is only one way to do that, write. People telling you what to do doesn't make you a writer. My job is to set up an environment and a set of circumstances that make people want to write.

"The thing about writing is it is unique because nobody else in the world has your combination of experiences. So it is worth trying to build avenues for writers to move along for that to be demonstrated. A lot of problems in the world would be solved if we learned to communicate better."

Hot topics
draw in audience

History, religion, politics and power are topics that draw the biggest crowds to the Canterbury WEA's (CWEA) series of current affairs and local issues lectures, many of which turn into lively debates.

As an active member of the programme committee, Patricia Morrison likes to see a series of lectures that keep people informed on the topics of the day.

"For the really burning issues we get a lot of people because they want to be able to talk about it," Patricia says.

"During the power crises we had a panel of the heads of the energy companies and plenty of people came to that.

"There was a plan to have a marine reserve at Akaroa harbour and according to the people planning it, a survey had been taken and everything was fine. We held a meeting and the fisher folk came, men and their wives and they were very vocal! We must have had 150 people and there was almost a fight at the end. One of the other WEA workers and I decided to serve a cup of tea to calm things down but when the groups went outside to the yard they were still arguing before they got in their cars. Then someone came up to me and said, 'the WEA does such good things!'

"Another great success was a course on architecture with most of the leading architects in Christchurch giving lectures once a week for nine weeks. There were about 100 people attending each week and all the architects came because they wanted to hear what each other had to say. The speakers were supposed to give no more than 20 illustrations but the competition was such that some went on and we couldn't stop them!

"We like to cover international issues and a programme we had about the first Gulf War packed the hall which holds just over 100."

Religion also draws people in and politician Don Brash's father, Reverend Alan Brash, ran a course on what the bible means for about nine years that was popular. John England's course on the hidden history of Christianity in Asia involved a series of lectures about religion along the Silk Road and was fascinating, Patricia says.

With an impressive international career behind her, global issues are Patricia's specialty. Her first international experience was a scholarship to study at Oxford University in England shortly after World War II. She had a masters degree in history, with first class honours, from Canterbury University (then Canterbury University College, which was part of the University of New Zealand) and at Oxford did a two year BA Honours degree.

"I was going to start a doctorate when I was offered a job in Geneva (Switzerland) in the International Student Service, now the World University Service. I was in the section that answered the needs of displaced students all over Europe. They had been removed (from studying) by Hitler's programme into camps and they wanted to get out of Europe, mostly to go to the States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

"We set up programmes for learning English and about the country they hoped to go to."

This was the beginning of a love affair with Geneva. Patricia spent some time back in New Zealand before being asked to go to Switzerland to work with the World YWCA in 1959. She returned to New Zealand in 1964 to be the National General Secretary of the YWCA here, before Geneva called her back again. This time she worked with all the YWCAs around the world as the secretary for cooperation and development. After 10 years in that role she went to the British YWCA and spent three years as the international secretary.

The British YWCA had a compulsory retirement age, which Patricia reached in 1982, but she wasn't ready to come home and wanted to stay in London.

She took on the role as general secretary for the World Congress of Faiths which is the oldest international interfaith organisation in the world.

"I had a part-time job which was very low paid and I lived like a student again, but it was interesting work and I learnt a great deal about other faiths. I took it on for six months and ended up staying five years."

In 1987 it was finally time to come back to New Zealand, but Patricia says she doesn't like doing nothing and set to work finding out what was happening in her home town of Christchurch.

"I decided to get to know Christchurch again and I noticed that the WEA had a Friday Foraging series. They went out on a bus weekly and while I thought it was about Christchurch, it was about Canterbury and some of the trips were well out of the city, which renewed my memories of the countryside."

Someone recognised her from her school days and roped her into joining the WEA programme committee, of which she is still an active member. She is a past-president of the CWEA and a member of the Executive and Council.

"While I didn't have any contact with the WEA for a long time, my first contact was as a student in the 1940s. I heard Dr Karl Popper, the famous international philosopher, was lecturing at the university but because of my commitments I couldn't attend. Then I found he was doing a course of lectures at the WEA for eight weeks in the evenings. I went with a school friend and there were only three women and about 40 men. Someone asked if anyone could take us home to South Christchurch and Dr Popper offered. We were exceedingly privileged but we didn't realise it at the time. He drove us home after every lecture and once he got us settled in the car he always asked us what we thought of the lecture. Later he became world famous."

Patricia says she has always kept up with local and international affairs by carefully reading the newspaper and this gives her ongoing ideas for lecture series for the WEA. She attends many of the lectures herself and says, "I do it because I enjoy it but I also want to know what the tutor is like."

With her academic background and international career she has fantastic contacts and can usually track down experts in any given field.

"We've had support from a very loyal group of university tutors, some of whom have been coming to the WEA for 30 years. They like to lecture and they are experts in their field. They get the opportunity to try things out on an audience where people answer back and argue - some people really do argue! It keeps the lecturers on their toes."

FWEA Book Discussion Scheme

The FWEA Book Discussion Scheme (BDS) started in 1973 in Christchurch as a pilot scheme, with the first groups formed in South Island rural areas. It has gradually expanded to become a nationwide service. Still based in Christchurch, the scheme is administered by the BDS Committee, a sub-committee of the Federation of Workers Educational Associations (FWEA).

A number of groups have been with the scheme since it began but there are now more than 700 groups throughout New Zealand, with 5-12 members per group. There are a large number of rural groups, with some members travelling considerable distances to meetings.

The scheme supplies sets of books to the groups from its catalogue of 574 titles. This is updated annually and new titles are added regularly. Book notes are especially written for the scheme and are supplied with the books. These contain commentary and information related to the text, as well as questions for discussion.

Groups meet monthly on an informal basis in their own homes to discuss the book that has been supplied to them. The convener of the group distributes these at each meeting and every member has a personal copy along with the book notes. A maximum of 10 titles are issued over the year. Discussions are from one to two hours long and can be guided by the questions contained in the book notes. Books and book notes are returned to the convener at the end of the discussion and returned to BDS for distribution to another group.

Currently subscriptions are $45 a year and the convener gets a reduced subscription of $25, in consideration of the extra work they do. Benefits of joining the scheme include access to an inexpensive source of good books - including new titles - and book notes, opportunities to meet regularly with others for stimulating discussion and companionship and exposure to a variety of authors, books and ideas. The small group situation is ideal for allowing people to gain in confidence when discussing the monthly books.

The BDS centre in Christchurch is operated by a staff of six, including a full-time paid coordinator who is a member of the committee. The voluntary committee, which meets on a monthly basis, is made up of book group members and makes administrative, financial and policy decisions, as well as book title choices. It reports regularly to the Federation.

Reading legacy lasts

A love of reading was a legacy Isobel Lawrence's parents passed on to her and she has been an active member of the Book Discussion Scheme (BDS) since her father helped start it up in 1973.

Her father, John Ryley, took up the position of general secretary of the Canterbury Workers Education Association (CWEA) shortly after he retired in the early 1970s. The president of the CWEA at the time, Allan Dingwall, had discovered the Victorian equivalent of the WEA in Australia, the Council of Adult Education, ran a book scheme and he was keen to see one started in New Zealand.

"He sent Dad over on a UNESCO fellowship to find out all about it and they gave him some sets of books and notes," Isobel says. "We still share notes occasionally with the Victorian scheme today.

"Initially the idea was that the BDS was something to bring people in isolated country areas together, and pilot groups were set up in a number of South Island areas. During the following year my father wanted to see if the idea would take on in the city. I lived in Halswell (a suburb of Christchurch) and he asked me to start up a group there.

"I had four young children so I said, 'No, I can't possibly start a group and read a book a month'."

Dad wasn't taking no for an answer though and he ran an advertisement in the local newspaper that netted an instant result.

"I met some really interesting people out of that advertisement. Some of them were neighbours I didn't know. It was the first city BDS group and it has been going well ever since."

Isobel is still a member of the original group she started and is on the sub-committee of the Federation of Workers Educational Associations (FWEA) that oversees the BDS from Christchurch. She has also been president of the sub-committee.

When her father died at the end of 1974, Isobel says it looked as if the scheme might fall over.

"Allan Dingwall wanted to keep it going so he asked me if I would take over my father's role, looking after it. It was fairly tough going but I agreed to do it."

Isobel is glad she did. In 1974 the annual report proudly boasted 31 titles, enough for 11 groups. Today there are 706 groups and 574 titles. The BDS centre in Christchurch is operated by a staff of six, including a full-time paid coordinator who is also a member of the committee.

Groups meet monthly on an informal basis in their own homes to discuss the book that has been supplied to them. Discussions are one to two hours long and can be guided by the questions contained in the book notes.

"It's sociable as well as intellectual," Isobel says. "In our group everyone voices a brief opinion of the book and the person running the discussion has to make sure everyone gets their say. Then there's a general discussion about it.

"Some of the titles on the book list cover subjects many of us would never have dreamt of reading about. But so often people say, 'I would never have chosen that book, but I got so much from it.'

"We recently discussed ***A Scandalous Life***, the biography of Jane Digby by Mary Lovell, and everyone loved it which surprised me because it wasn't an easy read. It's the fascinating story of English aristocrat Jane Digby in the 19th century. She ran away from her

first and second husbands, was virtually thrown out of English society and had numerous affairs before she met and married a Bedouin sheikh. She was 20 years older than him when they met but stayed with him until she died. It's an amazing book.

"In talking about the books you can get your opinions changed or see things differently."

Isobel says everyone loves being involved in selection of the books, whether it is at group or committee level.

At committee level considerations include style, construction, depth of the characters, ideas and the need to get a good discussion out of the book.

Isobel says she has never tired of her involvement with BDS and is more enthusiastic about it now than when her father roped her in begrudgingly at the start.

"I love reading and always, since I was a little child, I've wanted other people to read as well. When I buy a book I love to pass it on to other people."

Reading responsible for longevity

With his 85th birthday in March 2005, Bones Langley from Waipukurau believes reading is partially responsible for his longevity.

Bones co-ordinates the Waipukurau Book Group and says he'll be in the group as long as he can. Ten years ago he got involved in the group which is now at its capacity of 12.

"It helps keep me mentally alert and I guarantee it's one of the reasons I'm celebrating my 85th birthday.

"I've always been a great reader but I used to skim read until I joined this group. It has really improved my reading and because you discuss the books, you have to read them properly.

"They're the bright cookies of the district. It's a very happy group and since my wife died three years ago the companionship and fun has been important.

"I've made some great friends and in fact, everyone in the group is being invited to my birthday party, as friends."

As the co-ordinator Bones organises the group and arranges to receive and return the books to the BDS headquarters in Christchurch.

"I keep a roster and the meeting moves from house to house. There's no booze, it's a book discussion group!"

Non-alcoholic drinks and a snack are provided by the host of each meeting and there are 10 sessions a year.

The group meets once a month and Bones says all political strata are represented by the nine women and three men. He says the BDS brings together people who would not normally be in each others' circle of friends to read books they might not normally read and discuss things they might not ordinarily talk about.

"There are a couple of very religious people and the rest of us are pretty pragmatic. Everyone is very tolerant and while we do have strong discussions, it never gets out of hand.

"I haven't got any hair left but if I did it would be standing straight up sometimes, the things I hear! The Civil Union Bill really got one or two of the right-wingers going, but I squashed them!"

Open discussion has never been a reason for anyone to part from the group, Bones says, and people only leave for genuine reasons, such as leaving the area.

In fact people are so keen to be in the Waipukurau group, one man drives from Dannevirke once a month to take part.

"He never misses a meeting and it is quite a drive at night. But there were no men in the Dannevirke group so he didn't really enjoy it as much."

Bones has lived in Waipukurau since he retired from farming at Porongahau, on the east coast of central Hawke's Bay. He says he always read, even during the demanding long days on the farm.

Each BDS group selects its own titles for the year from a list provided and Bones says while he ends up reading a lot of books he wouldn't normally pick for himself, he's come across very few books he hasn't enjoyed.

"The only ones I personally have really disliked have been *Dune* (Frank Herbert), because I don't like that sort of book (science fiction). And I didn't like *The God Boy* (Ian Cross) or *Girls High* (Barbara Anderson)."

He says while he does think someone else should have a go at being the Waipukurau coordinator, no one else seems keen so he is happy to keep the role.

"I enjoy it. I boss them all around! And I get very annoyed when people don't turn up."

Southland Workers Educational Association

"Education never ends. There is no point at which a man can say, 'I am completely educated', because the process is a continuing one that has no limits. Many adults, whose main concern is to make a living, feel an urge to widen their knowledge of those things which are the logical extension of school education. It is to satisfy this need that the WEA came into existence. The value of this institution cannot be measured in words." – F W G Miller, famous Southlander at Southland WEA's 50th anniversary in 1965

Southland WEA has been in Invercargill since 1915 and is one of the founding WEAs of Aotearoa New Zealand. It caters for the educational, social needs and interests of people in both Invercargill and surrounding country areas.

Small classes, low cost, non-examination courses, an atmosphere of student participation and a high level of individual attention by dedicated tutors make the courses accessible to everyone.

The organisation always wanted its own base, having started life in the office of the Southland Education Board. The then president, the late E R (Ted) Latham and secretary, Florence Day, made this possible when they acquired the building at 100 Esk St, Invercargill that formerly housed the coffee importing and manufacturing business of David Strang & Co. The WEA Centre was officially opened on 6 March 1969 and its character structure is now classified as an historic building.

Making good use of grants over the years the building has been extensively renovated.

Southland WEA offers courses in response to community needs and its courses led to the formation of the Invercargill Citizens' Advice Bureau, Photographic Society and Arts Society.

The organisation also has a tradition of community service and development and shares its building with other voluntary organisations including the Stopping Violence Southland programme.

When government withdrew funding in 1991, Southland WEA became dependent on the goodwill of benefactors including the New Zealand Lottery Grants Board, Community Trust of Southland, Invercargill Licensing Trust, New Zealand FWEA and COGS.

Courses include various art disciplines, patchwork, guitar, yoga, golf, landscape design, antiques, paper tole and calligraphy.

Life wrapped up in a patchwork quilt

In the movie *How to Make an American Quilt* (an adaptation of the novel by Whitney Otto) quilters share their unique life stories with the central character, a young woman contemplating her future. As they make a quilt for her wedding, their experiences are brought to life and she gains an insight into love and relationships in this tribute to women's friendship and camaraderie.

To some extent, life imitates art at the Southland WEA's patchworking classes and while tutor Errolyn Taane emphasises it's not a therapy session, she says people do share their personal stories over time.

While a sense of achievement may sound like a simple concept, for some women who take these patchwork classes, it's a huge step.

People with illness, disabilities, who are grieving or have low self-esteem through bad relationships or the reality of being stay at home mums, congregate in classes and benefit from creativity and reaching achievable goals.

"There is camaraderie and support. People share fabrics, ideas and patchworking advice and women who have never asked someone for an opinion on their work before feel that they can do that," Errolyn says.

One student with cerebral palsy finds patchwork helps build different muscles and hand skills and to attend the classes she needs to climb up and down the stairs which is in itself, an achievement.

"For someone with a disability to be able to work alongside people without that and be able to produce the same kind of work, it's very good for her self esteem. She has bought her own home with a partner and belonging to the patchwork group has enabled her to make some of her own home furnishings."

Errolyn says another student began the class after a bad relationship. At home she was constantly told she was useless and couldn't achieve anything. At the patchwork class she did achieve and that boosted her self-confidence enabled her to get out of the relationship.

"She unpicked and re-did a lot of the work she did while she was in that relationship because she hated it. Quite a lot of her story is represented in her work. She's pleased with what she has done and has enrolled to come back and start something fresh."

Errolyn says she began teaching patchwork classes after her husband was killed in an accident. She gave up work as a teacher but found after her grieving time, she needed to get back to meeting people and feeling of some use to society.

"I took a year off to pursue my interest in art and crafts. I'd been involved in patching for about 12 years and decided it was time to share some of what I had learnt with others."

When the long-time patchworking tutor Lesley du Mez decided to focus on the role of WEA director, Errolyn was keen to take over the three classes a week rather than return to full-time work.

"The WEA is a good place to start getting out and about without going into the competitiveness of some large educational institution where people might not be sympathetic to your needs. For people who lack confidence the WEA is a warm and friendly environment with lots of support."

She admits patchwork is addictive and can lead to constantly buying fabrics that catch the eye.

"Spotlight is opening up in Invercargill which is very exciting for us and should boost enthusiasm!" ■

Craft creates challenges

When Mary McKillop married, gave up work and had children, she found herself lonely and isolated.

"I was an older mother and I had very few support networks. My parents were dead and I found when I left work, I lost contact with those friends as well. I lost a lot of self-esteem and once I decided to get out of the house, I felt I'd lost my social skills as well," Mary says.

"I wanted to get out of the house but I'm not a Plunket lady, so I went along to the patchwork class at the WEA. I'd done a little bit of patchwork in the past and I find doing something crafty does stimulate your mind."

Twelve years later, Mary is still going to weekly patchwork classes run by the Southland WEA in Invercargill.

"I get a lot out of it. If I'm having a bad day the creativity and challenges involved are really exciting. It's a cool feeling when you've done a quilt from square one, even dyeing all the material. It's really good for the self esteem.

"There are up to 15 people in a class and everyone has different skills but you feel you are with kindred spirits. I do things a bit off beam and like to use bright colours but the tutors are always helpful and patient with me. It's a very safe place for me to be."

For a long time Southland WEA director Lesley du Mez was Mary's tutor and she says through attending the patchwork classes and talking to Lesley, she got the confidence to retrain so she could get part-time work. She gained a National Certificate in Computing from the Southern Institute of Technology (SIT) and is working as a teacher aid in an Invercargill secondary school.

"The SIT is a completely different atmosphere to the WEA. I've been to both for different reasons and the SIT is more business focused while the WEA is more localised and really caters for lots of different people."

Mary says while she hasn't made any close friends in the classes, she likes the companionship of patchwork and at the end of each term the classes go out for coffee. She has also found the tutors supportive and encouraging.

She says getting out of the house and getting back her self esteem, as well as the opportunity to unleash her creative side, have been the greatest benefits of patchwork for her.

"It is good to be working again. Children don't realise you have a life outside of them but it is important to have that.

"When you are home all the time you can't justify shopping for say, a nice pair of shoes. Now I work I feel that need those shoes and that I need to make an effort to look good!"

FEDERATION OF WEAs

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