



Equine Assisted Learning

www.facebook.com/TrueTrails
<https://truetrails.com.au/>

To the Tasmanian Literacy Advisory Panel
Community Consultation

Dear Panel,

Thank you for the opportunity to put forward a valid community-based contribution into the development of a progressive and effective literacy policy for learners and teachers in this state.

For your information, I have the following experience with community consultation processes:

Development of user-led literacy program, a Not-For Profit organisation, and owner/manager of True Trails learning assistance business.

Consultation for Skills Impact as an SME in the Animal Assisted Service sector qualifications development.

Community board representative for the Southeast Employment Hub

Development and input into Codes and standards for the Animal Assisted Services.

Chair of the Tasmanian Animal Therapies LTD committee, member of the national ATL committee.

Introduction

True Trails is an Equine Assisted Learning provider. In a "nutshell", we provide a soft environment and equine interaction activities to motivate struggling learners, the neurodiverse, and those diagnosed with SpLD's to engage in learning.

We provide user-led programs which have been developed from individuals, community, and systemic needs and deficits. Programs have been developed over a period of eight years. These were initially funded through grants and focused on the Southeast Tasmania region. We now provide services through the NDIS and the T3 Engagement - Glenorchy program.

Target age group is from 7 years to adult. Program participation occurs once a week, in school terms, two hours per session. We have impacted approximately 65 learners and their families as well as additional impacts into wellbeing and work readiness for approximately 50 more participants.

Program participation occurs once a week, in school terms, two hours per session. We require a minimum of ten weeks participation to achieve results in literacy and learning.

The programs we provide can be summarized as follows:

AWAKE- Learner Capacity program focusing on learning skills.

READ, WRITE, RIDE - Literacy program

RIDE UP, ADD UP- Numeracy program

SPEAK- Communication skills program

GETTING IT BACK- Wellness program

Literacy

The literacy program has been our most popular program due to need. We have designed and implemented a levelled, phonetic, whole language framework as the READ, WRITE, RIDE program. This program's phonetic framework development has drawn from numerous and well known literacy programs and the onsite assessments of strengths and deficits of participating learners over the years.

The program is now well-developed with levels and phases and sits as an excellent framework to address all participating learners. It has numerous strategies which have significantly impacted the high level of successes and outcomes for our participants.

It is this framework and our program strategies which may be of specific interest to your policy.

Specific Strategies can be summarized as follows:

1. Addressing learner motivation
2. Blending activity with academics - multi-sensory resources, competency based, desk - activity blend
3. Innovative assessment practices
4. Physical activity to ensure brain function
5. Utilizing strengths and addressing deficits
6. Engagement with family and community in participants' learning
7. Individualised supports
8. Service provider/professional supports collaboration/referrals- orthoptic issues
9. User-led program design
10. Scaffolded documents, assessments, readers, and specialised resources for learner deficits
11. Weekly at home activities and follow up consolidating activities
12. Rewards and certificates for attainments in levels
13. Game based approaches

Overview of systemic deficit

Over our eight years of program delivery and development, we have been impacted by the high percentage (99%) of our participants who have presented with undiagnosed orthoptic issues.

Lack of eye muscle tracking skills and orthoptic development in learners' eye function significantly impacts the information going to the brain and a learner's ability to read and write. Digitally printed and screen fonts present significant issues in the development of the learner's eye muscle to track and read.

Teachers and parents alike are totally ignorant and uninformed of the significance of orthotic development in young and developing readers. Orthoptics has now become a "therapy" rather than a baseline skill to be trained and taught to our learners through adequately printed and scaffolded reading materials (such as the "ancient" Ladybird readers!)

A lack of timely and informed diagnosis, deficits in teacher training/knowledge of the significance of orthoptic development, and the impact of teaching phonetically to build eye tracking skills, all have combined to present as a significant systemic deficit and issue in the education system and optometric practices which greatly affects literacy and learning in our state.

It is my firm belief and experience, if the department began to address this issue in line with a new, and strategic phonetic/ whole language literacy policy, that Tasmania's aspirational literacy target can not only be reached, but also set a precedential policy for other Australian states.

I am available to discuss any of these specifics and please do not hesitate to be in contact for further and more detailed information.

Yours Sincerely,

Mrs. Cheri Allanby

Dear panel, please be informed of further details which may be of some value to your policy formation:

As a summary, our previous document outlined our specific program strategies. The additional information may be helpful:

Specific Strategies

1. Addressing learner motivation (Numerous aspects have impacted motivation)
2. Blending activity with academics – multi-sensory resources, competency based, desk – activity blend (the practice of competency-based documents and assessment processes to enhance literacy outcomes could be applied to numerous subjects and activities within a school.)
3. Innovative assessment practices (non-desk based or room-based assessments soften student responses)
4. Physical activity to ensure brain function
5. Utilizing strengths and addressing deficits (deficits are targeted by assessment practices)
6. Engagement with family and community in participants’ learning (family engagement in learning strategies has massively impacted learners’ outcomes)
7. Individualised supports
8. Service provider/professional supports collaboration/referrals- orthoptic issues
9. User-led program design
10. Scaffolded documents, assessments, readers, and specialised resources for learner deficits (scaffolded documents have been a significant strategy to engage in reading and writing and develop skills. We are happy to give examples of the most successful formats we use). Scaffolding includes: colour coding phonetics, document layouts, fonts, font spacing, line spacing, font size.
11. Weekly at home activities and follow up consolidating activities
12. Rewards and certificates for attainments in levels
13. Game based approaches

Outcomes achieved at True Trails Read, Write Ride

Demand for program became intensive over 2014-2018. Demand for literacy skills remains.

Outcomes included: engagement in literacy, behavioural changes at school, re-engagement, uptake of reading and writing, interest in literacy, positive attitude shifts to literacy, orthoptic developments impacting reading and comprehension, high levels of interest in whole language/phonetic blend from families.