

The Right to Literacy

ACAL's achievements

SIX YEARS AFTER its formation, the Australian Council for Adult Literacy (ACAL) can view its achievements with pride, yet without losing sight of all that remains to be done.

ACAL is an organisation with broadly based aims, and this is reflected in its membership. Its primary concerns are to promote a ready exchange of ideas and experiences among people working in the field; to increase public awareness of the adult illiteracy problem and to encourage interest in ways of overcoming the problem.

Five national conferences have been organised by ACAL so far, and a sixth is scheduled to take place in Hobart from 6-10 August. By the end of 1982, it is expected that every Australian state will have a state council or association for adult literacy.

ACAL has been responsible for producing a number of publications, including the regular newsletter *Literacy Link*, which provides up-to-date information on developments in the adult literacy field. *On the Importance of Being Literate* is about to go into its second edition, and Darryl Dymock's *A Survey of Education for Adult Literacy in Australia* will shortly be published; his book is the first comprehensive survey in this area.

With the co-operation of the British Council, ACAL organised Australia-wide lecture and seminar tours in 1977 and 1981, and a similar project is being planned for this year. Looking further ahead, ACAL is planning an international seminar on adult literacy, to include people from developing countries as well as the industrialised nations.

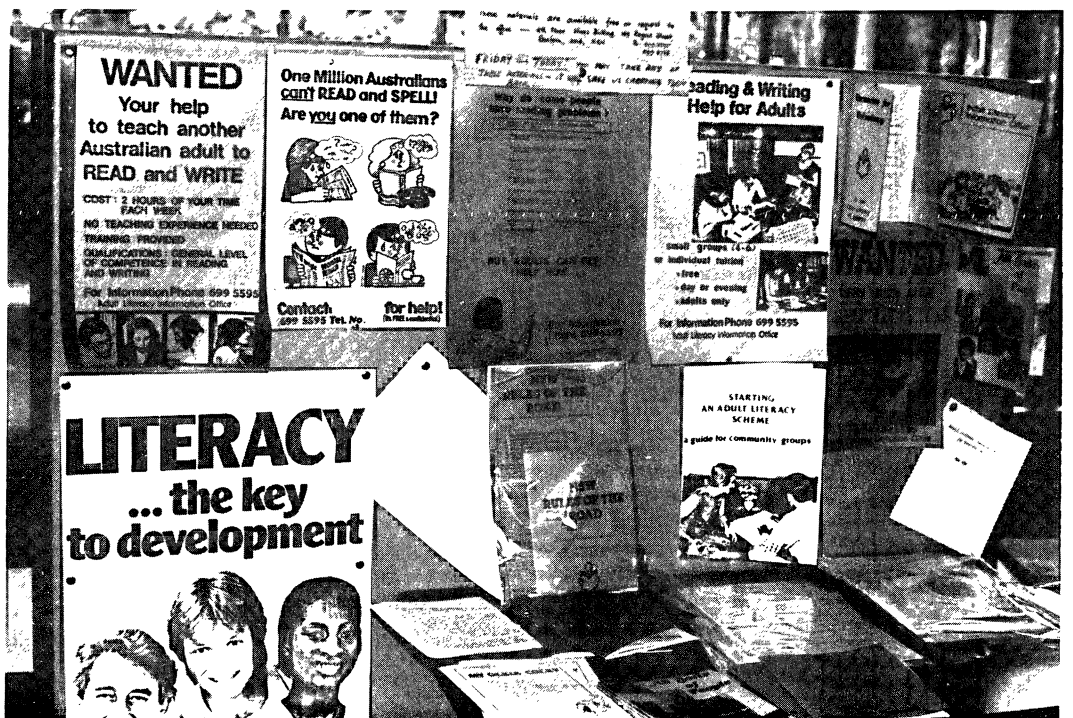
Although relatively little research has been carried out in this field, available information suggests that there may be as many as one million Australian adults who are functionally illiterate, and that there are many more who only cope with difficulty. But only a few thousand are at present being helped to overcome their problems.

What of the rest? The lack of adequate resources means that there is not a great deal available for them. At present there is not even a long term plan for their assistance.

At the UNESCO-sponsored Third International Conference in Adult Education it was stated that the major task of adult education during the Second Development Decade of the United Nations was to seek out and serve those people who were educationally underprivileged. This statement was supported by the representatives of the Australian Government who attended the conference. This was in 1972 – ten years later we should ensure that, both at home and abroad, we attempt to carry out the principles we have endorsed.



'The widening gap between nations, groups and individuals constitutes the greatest moral challenge of our time. To close the gap is more than a question of social justice . . . Experience shows that the provision of more education in most communities tends to favour most the already well educated; the educationally underprivileged have yet to claim their rights. Adult education is no exception to the rule, for those adults who most need education have largely been neglected.' Unesco conference, 1972.



A display board at ACAL National Conference, Brisbane, August 1981. For more information about the work of ACAL, contact Darryl Dymock, ACAL, c/- Department of Continuing Education, University of New England, Armidale, NSW 2351.