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Speech by Adam Graycar:

"Non-formal adult education"

delivered to the Helping Hand Centre, Adelaide,  
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HELPING HAND (NOTES)

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3/4/86

ADAM GRAYCAR

Over the past five years 23 per cent of people aged 55 to 64 yrs, and 10 per cent of those aged 65 and over have participated in non-formal adult education. For a significant number of people therefore, retirement or the period leading up to retirement is not a time of dormant learning experiences, an intellectual wasteland, but rather a time to learn new skills, acquire new knowledge, and feel part of the broader society.

For too long, [REDACTED] education, work and leisure have been compartmentalized into different parts of the life cycle - childhood, adulthood and retirement. With the very obvious need to integrate education, work and leisure into our changing social structure, - a structure which is seeing later labour force entry, shorter working hours and early retirement, we must all be aware that the thirst for knowledge does not diminish with age - often it expands if the encouragement is

Elderly Australians comprise a rapidly growing "resource of talent and seasoned experience". They have the "wisdom and perspective that people acquire only with age" thus enhancing "their contributions and value" to the community. [REDACTED]

There still exist to some extent myths and stereotypes about ageing that serve as a barrier to effective participation by the elderly ....

"A culture that looks to youth to capture a lifetime of happiness and solve all of its problems is a culture that adopts a restrictive view and narrows its potential"<sup>1</sup>. Yet our society is youth-oriented, due largely to the advertising media "with its message that to be young is synonymous with freedom, opportunities, challenges, success, glamour and fulfilment."

Retirement therefore, is considered a consignment to oblivion,

Retirement has been likened to a career, but marked by one essential difference from the career of employment. "In retirement, the individual has an opportunity to emerge from behind the many masks or roles imposed by the nature of his/her employment and attendant commitments. It may mean that individuals experience freedom for the first time in their lives ..." - from job responsibilities, family responsibilities ...

Another common myth is that one's ability to learn deteriorates with age. However, Australian studies have shown "that the greater part of the Australian population retains its mental ability with little, if any, decline".

The notion that old age is an intellectual plateau is being demolished and we are "realizing that people can, and do, learn new skills and acquire new knowledge at any age" [REDACTED]

Quote from one senior citizen who had returned to school:

"The more I know, the more I realize how much there is to know'. Perhaps that ... realization only comes with the wisdom of age." [REDACTED]

"This emerging freedom to adopt new life styles, to learn new skills or resurrect old ones, to enrich the society through work and creative use of leisure poses an exciting challenge ...." [REDACTED]

"But if we are to introduce some vibrant and dramatic colours into the supposedly peaceful landscape of old age, we must begin to structure programs that will enable senior citizens to realize their full potential." [REDACTED]

*Resources for Living*

"To those with limited vision education is seen as a means to making a living whereas in reality it should be seen as a mean to living."

Of all the educational areas in which older people were involved, art and craft was the most popular, followed by fitness, sport and games, food processing and preparation, humanities and social sciences, languages, woodwork and building.

[REDACTED]

It is of interest to note that while in general older people were comparatively more likely than younger people to be involved in courses related to art and craft, food, languages, humanities and social sciences, they were comparatively less likely than younger people to be involved in courses relating to physical fitness; paramedical, health and counselling; science, mathematics or computing; engineering and electronics; or office skills.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Whereas about 60 per cent of people (of all ages) involved in courses are women, for those aged 65 and over, 72 per cent of participants in non-formal education are women (12 per cent of women over 65 compared with 6 per cent of men participate). "Why is there such a startling difference between the sexes here? - Do older men know it all - are they more content with gardening or T.V. or just happy doing what they've always done and they don't find the need to seek out new challenges? "I think it is just harder" [REDACTED] "for older men to adapt and change and seek out new horizons".

"While 1986 is only just 3 months old, this is the third educational venture for older people of which my office has been supportive so far this year" [REDACTED] "The University of the Third Age is being established and Elderhostel College for Seniors had a successful week in Adelaide in January".

"School for Seniors, as developed by the Helping Hand Centre is a strong and positive force in our society and when combined with other educational endeavours for older people will strengthen the ability of our older population to participate in all aspects of our society, will enhance their self concept and will enrich our society tremendously" [REDACTED]