

An Interview With Glenys O'Riley

After more than 16 years of using MULTILIT, Glenys O'Riley is now the National Education Manager of the Exodus Foundation Literacy Programs, managing the Centres in Ashfield, Redfern, Gladstone and a new centre recently opened in Darwin.

You were with MUSEC working on the original MULTILIT Reading Tutor Program, is that right?

I was lucky enough to be part of the original team that began work on the MULTILIT program in the early 1990s under the guidance of Margrit Frishknecht, then the executive teacher of the AIM program at MUSEC. The first edition of the MULTILIT package was published in 1998.

What was the gap in the market that the MULTILIT Program fulfilled?

There are very costly programs like Reading Recovery that cater for the early years but once a student progresses to Year 2, there is nothing on offer for older students. The MULTILIT Program is unique because it caters for these older low-progress students. There was (and still is) no program that can first of all accurately identify low-progress readers, and secondly, offer an intensive, systematic and explicit intervention to help these students 'catch up' in reading related skills and bring them up to the level of their peers. The school syllabus statements and expectations of the upper primary years do not cover the skills taught in the MULTILIT Program. For the low-progress students, the gap simply gets wider.

What do you think differentiates MULTILIT from other literacy programs?

One of the important things that differentiates MULTILIT from other literacy programs is that it is a researched, controlled program so student gains are always accurately measured by the teachers/tutors using the principle of data-based instruction which informs their teaching. Data is collected regularly to ensure students are always at their correct instructional level and that students are being taught the relevant skills. As well as the CBM data, there is also standardised pre- and post- testing which measures the overall gains students have made.

The use of 'Positive Teaching' strategies completes the MULTILIT package. It lays the foundations for the overall success of students into the future. It gives students a belief in their

ability to achieve academically and socially. They gain a more optimistic approach to learning. Expectations rise not only for the student, but also for their teachers.

You are now running the Exodus Literacy Programs. What has attracted you back to the Exodus Foundation?

I had a wonderful experience working at the Exodus Centre in those early (pioneering) days when the MULTILIT Program was first established at Ashfield. It was a very rewarding time. The partnership between Professor Kevin Wheldall, Robyn Beaman and the Rev. Bill Crews gave greater emphasis to the idea of MULTILIT being a preventative model. Rev. Bill Crews' mission involved working with homeless people, in particular homeless youth, many of whom had dropped out of school because of poor literacy skills. The goal was to use the MULTILIT Program to help prevent this from happening. With good literacy skills, at least there was a choice for these students as to whether or not they stayed on till Year 10 and beyond. Follow-up studies showed a high retention rate for those who attended the Ashfield Schoolwise Tutorial Centre. I felt very lucky to be part of the team that helped lay the foundations of the outreach model. So accepting the position was an easy decision to make.

Are there any particular results or success stories that stand out in your mind?

Yes, there are many stories, but a few will always be close to my heart.

I remember one boy in Year 4 who came to MUSEC as a non-reader. This student made gains of four years in just one year, reaching the reading age level of his peers. He was so grateful that his parents had sent him to MUSEC and given him the chance to improve his literacy skills that he organised to treat his family to a special dinner where he bought the ingredients and cooked the dinner himself, reading from a recipe book. He went from strength to strength, becoming captain of the school in Year 6.

Another student who really stands



Glenys O'Riley at the new Exodus Building in Ashfield

out is a Year 11 student from a local high school. He had a reading age of just 7.6 years but after just nine months of tutoring, he had almost reached a functional level in reading accuracy. His reading gains gave him loads of self-confidence in terms of being able to make eye contact with people he spoke to, talking to girls, ordering a meal in a restaurant and being able to pass his driving test.

How do you think the MULTILIT program will go at the Exodus Centre in Darwin?

In Darwin we are looking forward to starting in Term 2, with 20 students using the MULTILIT Program in the afternoon and 20 students using MINILIT in the mornings. The program is actually at the school so it will be easy for kids to get to and from the centre.

Every site is different, it is a learning experience. They all have unique problems and issues. Yet, the same methods work for everyone. We teach and test the same way and the Positive Teaching is the same at all centres.

If you had to name one reason for your involvement with MULTILIT what would it be?

It would probably be the framework of Positive Teaching, it is truly inspiring. Marrying Positive Teaching with the program gives the MULTILIT Program its powerful qualities. Positive reinforcement helps students know they are on the right track both academically and socially. The key is recognising appropriate behaviours and giving students specific, contingent, and genuine praise for their success. It's a powerful approach to behaviour management and learning.

Thanks Glenys for your time and your passion!