

Computing Skills

First Click/Second Click are initiatives funded by the WA Department of Education and Training

For more information about Ruah Community Services please see

www.ruah.com.au



Ruah Vision and Mission

Vision: A socially just, compassionate, participative and sustainable community.

Mission: To redress disadvantage and enhance the human spirit.

Ruah support programs work continually with people experiencing significant social disadvantage through major mental health issues, substance use, homelessness and other complex concerns. Ruah is assertive in building a capacity and commitment in its workforce towards addressing social exclusion, including in the area of the digital divide. Addressing barriers and facilitating pathways to participation in education, training and work has become an embedded strategy in Ruah's psychosocial and case management support services.

Ruah First Click/Second Click project has been funded by the Department of Education and Training since 2003. First Click/Second Click funding provides an opportunity for the people with whom Ruah works to take the first steps in becoming computer literate and being personally proactive in breaking down the digital divide that otherwise excludes them. In today's society, access to and knowledge of computing is essential, as banking, Centrelink, bill paying and other important daily tasks go online. Without programs like First Click/Second Click, many people from disadvantaged groups would continue to be excluded from keeping up with the technological world. ***By the end of the current funding round (2008-2009), Ruah will have been able to provide free computing skills courses to over 300 participants of its services since 2003.***

Annual Ruah Inreach client service evaluation identifies client goals and focus for work and has repeatedly nominated pathways to education and training as a focus for work. In 2003, Ruah initiated research and interagency collaboration in the

- Holding afternoon sessions to offset early morning effects of psychiatric medication.
- Providing participants in First Click/Second Click with the opportunity to feel a part of, and understand, information technology.
- Offering a pathway to further learning/work opportunities through building the skills/confidence to enrol in other courses, register with an employment service, return to work, or explore other training options.
- Providing an opportunity for peer exchange/support during lesson break time.
- Facilitating access to free recycled computers and a low-cost internet provider so learning can be consolidated at home, during and after the course.
- Encouraging independent, continued learning through Microsoft Office Online Training.
- Creating desire in students to transform and improve their lives through participation and learning and community engagement and linking.
- Opening up the possibility that participants can use newly gained computer skills to mentor others experiencing negative effects of the digital divide.
- Using the supported education model, promoting the course to staff via information pack containing course content, structure, booking procedure, and ways to best support students in accessing and maintaining the learning opportunity (ie: mentoring for readiness, initial transport assistance, debriefing between sessions, assistance to access recycled computers, follow-on courses, employment services etc).

entrance test due to poor literacy skills. Although she was disappointed, she has not given up and has asked (the Peer Supporter) to assist her to access literacy classes, determined that she will one day be able to fulfil her goal to further her education at TAFE. Another outcome for her is that she developed a friendship with another participant. Both were previously socially isolated, as is often the case for those living with mental illness. The two now go cycling to improve their physical health and wellbeing and have been successful in applying for funding for a holiday together. The participant stated that all these developments re further education, social connection and physical health would not have happened if she hadn't attended First Click."

Factors contributing to project success

- Ascertaining and knowing the target group's needs re computer skills training.
- Utilising mainstream learning environments with up-to-date resources, so as to offer quality, safe and normalising environments; ensuring that the learning environment is easy to access via public transport.
- Creating an inclusive, supportive learning environment and building a positive learning experience.
- Providing staged learning opportunities, from one-to-one to small group, to formal class.
- Customising course content, delivery and learning strategies to suit the learning needs specific to the target individual/group (slower-paced training/more repetition and revision/use of a mentor during sessions) and being ready to adapt if required.
- Utilising tutors with extensive experience in teaching computing skills **and** in working with people living with a psychiatric disability and/or complex social issues.
- Facilitating the transfer of course learning to home computers through providing manuals/information sheets and ensuring participants have home computers they can use to consolidate/apply class learning.

area of addressing barriers to education and training for people living with a mental illness, which resulted in the 2004 report: **Access - Participation - Success!** This report identified barriers experienced by people living with mental illness to their participation and success in vocational education and training, finding that people living with a psychiatric disability *"are seeking a more meaningful life role; particularly in education and training as a stepping stone to employment, poverty reduction and social inclusion."*

Ruah First Click/Second Click provides individuals experiencing social exclusion and multidimensional barriers to participation in mainstream educational environments due to psychiatric disability and/or complex social issues an opportunity to:

- Gain basic computer literacy skills and computer confidence.
- Increase confidence and knowledge about how to access community computer facilities, other training opportunities/resources, and free recycled computers.
- Build on basic computing skills through extended training sessions in Microsoft Word and Excel.
- Address issues of access and inclusion through the promotion of acquisition and use of computers as a catalyst for transforming and improving life and work.

Key objectives

The key objectives of Ruah First Click/Second Click project are:

- Dispelling fear and anxiety associated with using computers.
- Building confidence and skills.
- Building positive learning experiences.
- Creating a desire to consolidate learning.
- Providing a pathway to further learning/training/work opportunities.
- Addressing issues of disadvantage, access and inclusion.
- Reducing social isolation/increasing community connection.

Meeting the needs of participants

Because of their marginalisation, participants of Ruah First Click/Second Click face many barriers to participation in mainstream education and employment, including issues of stigma in the general population; inability to complete courses due to relapse; anxiety and confidence issues; effects of extended absence from learning/employment; effects of medication; lack of support in mainstream learning; tutors not necessarily skilled in dealing with the learning issues they face; low income; and transport issues. They seek meaningful activity, particularly in education and training, as a pathway to work, poverty reduction and social inclusion.

Ruah psychosocial support services have an embedded strategy of addressing barriers and facilitating pathways to participation in education and work. Ruah participants have identified confidence and skill-building pathways to education and training as one of the priorities of work with Ruah, so as to break down barriers that prevent people living with mental illness from pursuing further mainstream education/training and/or employment opportunities. Ruah First Click/Second Click courses are thus structured to maximise skills and confidence building and provide a normalising and positive learning experience.

Ruah First Click/Second Click also addresses the needs of participants around issues of access and inclusion with regard to the digital divide. This has meant the extension of Ruah First Click/Second Click into a program which also ensures that all students acquire their own free recycled computer so they can maintain and build on computing skills gained in the course and in recognition that the promotion and use of computers could provide an impetus for transforming and improving life and work.

Ruah First Click/Second Click training links directly into what Ruah is trying to achieve in work with disadvantaged people

much less venture that distance on my own! Committing to the Second Click course for nine weeks doing Word and Excel was really throwing me in the deep end. That first day of the course I didn't know what to expect and it was very daunting. I was amazed that I actually arrived there on that first day! There was no intimidation, I just felt understood with no pressure from (the trainer) or anyone. There was a glimmer of hope, maybe I could do this?

"Anyway, every week got easier and gave me a sense of mastery I guess, a feeling I had not felt for years. Doing the class on a weekly basis ... was fantastic! The pace was so right for me, (the) teaching was so good! I knew I had no skills ... that was a fact! Then week after week I found myself really understanding what (the trainer) was teaching, really 'getting it.' I started to feel better and better as each week passed. This feeling rippled into other areas of my life, my self esteem and confidence were starting to improve, I was actually starting to feel happy! It was so good.

"Then about a month ago during one of my appointments with (the Employment Coordinator), she was looking into a MYOB course for me on completion of Second Click. This is where we ... learned about the (Government Work Skills Vouchers). Within a week I had the \$1950 voucher from Canberra and I was starting the Certificate II Business Administration Course! I chose full time study which I started three weeks ago and honestly, I haven't looked back! I love it! And I'm doing so well! I completed Word books 1 and 2 within the first week and now I've almost completed Excel! It's all thanks to (the Second Click trainer). (Second Click) gave me the confidence to be able to do this course and ... the knowledge and the skills to be able to do it well!!! It is exactly what I need and I'm so confident and excited about being able to return to the workforce and get a great job! I can't wait! I love getting up and getting ready to go to the college. I have so much energy and enthusiasm now, I experience 'bubbles' of happiness from within that I haven't felt in years. Oh, life is good...."

A Ruah Peer Support Worker based in Rockingham who supported a participant to attend First Click, comments that if it wasn't for First Click:

"(The participant) would not have found the courage to apply to do a course at TAFE. Unfortunately, she did not pass the TAFEWA

confidence, skills to successfully access computers in community settings/internet cafes/libraries/learning centres.

- Individuals able to feel a part of, and understand, information technology so prevalent in all aspects of today's society.
- Building of positive learning experiences.
- Addressing issues of access and inclusion and barriers to learning.

Secondary outcomes

- Creating a desire to consolidate learning.
- Opening up the possibility of acquiring a personal computer.
- Creating opportunities for people to **reconnect with family** and friends via email (so vital for participants of Ruah services, many having lost contact with significant others because of years of illness, disadvantage and other circumstances).
- Decreased social isolation: providing possibility for individuals to **reconnect with their community** in a positive, inclusive way.
- Providing individuals with the skills to mentor peers and others in the community, thus encouraging others to negotiate the digital divide.
- Providing a life-giving impetus for significant changes in people's lives.

Many of the First/Second Click objectives/outcomes identified by Ruah are encapsulated in the following experiences of a First Click student and a Second Click student.

A Second Click participant who had been battling severe, disabling depression for five and a half years writes:

"When (my Ruah Workright Employment Coordinator) booked me in to do the Second Click course ... I was so scared. Firstly, West Perth? How was I going to be able to get there? Too far away and unfamiliar territory. I haven't been able to leave the house for years,

and the breaking down of barriers to full participation in community life. It does this by:

- Motivating individuals to participate in mainstream (normalising) activity.
- Providing individuals with an opportunity to engage with information technology.
- Providing pathways to education and work.
- Providing opportunities to reconnect with family/friends/community, thereby reducing social and physical isolation and loneliness (in one learning-to-email session, a disconnection from family of many years' duration can begin to be bridged).
- Creating confidence in students to go on and access/utilise community resources (free recycled computers, libraries, internet cafes, learning centres etc).
- Addressing low levels of confidence and high levels of anxiety about attending mainstream learning environments by simulating mainstream learning.

Program delivery strategies

First Click/Second Click sessions are structured to cater for all presenting learning needs, from one-to-one sessions, to small group, to classes of 12. First Click can be delivered using all three strategies over a three-week period with two 2-hour sessions per week. Second Click provides extended learning, over nine consecutive weeks, in Word and Excel. Students can choose to do one (2 hours per week) or both Second Click courses (4 hours per week).

Experience and learning gathered since the beginning of Ruah First/Second Click courses in 2003 has identified the program delivery strategies that optimise successful outcomes and work best for the main target group, ie people living with a mental illness:

- Utilising a supported education approach, which maximises learning outcomes for individuals who lack confidence,

suffer anxiety, cognitive, physical and sensory problems often associated with psychiatric illness and the side effects of medication, by addressing in a supported way, the range of barriers experienced by students due to psychiatric disability.

- Utilising tutors with experience in teaching computing skills and in working with people living with a psychiatric disability; who can impart skills and knowledge whilst being empathetic/responsive to needs/challenges of participants, and skilled with dealing with the learning issues they face; tutors able to address past negative learning experiences; tutors who ensure that the delivery strategies are always mindful of and adaptable to presenting needs.
- Facilitating the transfer of course learning to home computers through ensuring all students have a home computer; provision of relevant course material, and other weekly information sheets; and teaching participants to independently access continuing training in Word and Excel skills through the Microsoft Online Training tutorials website.
- Ensuring that the learning venue is safe, inclusive and supportive, and is central and easy to access. First Click courses are run in **Rockingham, Armadale and Fremantle**, depending on demand. First and Second Click courses are also held at WestOne in **West Perth**; a training facility that best approximates a mainstream learning environment (in setup, teaching equipment, up-to-date computers, and reliable and fast internet connection). WestOne staff are very welcoming and inclusive towards students, helping to offset past negative learning experiences in mainstream education. A breakaway room for tea and coffee adjacent to the computer lab has the added advantage of facilitating peer exchange and support at break times.
- Having afternoon sessions enables a high attendance rate to be sustained, offsetting detrimental early morning side effects of psychiatric medications which have impacted on the successful attendance of courses previously attempted by participants.

- Structuring class size to presenting need (one-to-one, small group, large class). Second Click sessions (class of 12) aim to provide a normalising learning experience for students, thus helping to build confidence that they can sustain learning opportunities in the larger class groups of mainstream courses.
- Providing transport via support worker to and from initial sessions for those with significant anxiety issues.

Key project outcomes

- Dispel anxiety, fear and intimidation associated with using computers.
- Participants able to negotiate Desktop, My Computer, My Documents, the internet, email.
- Participants gain understanding of computer software/hardware, including extended familiarisation with common software packages, eg Word and Excel.
- Provision of a pathway to further education, training and work opportunities through building the skills and confidence to continue learning, with some individuals enrolling in follow-on mainstream courses, retuning to work, joining an employment service, or exploring other training options.
- Disadvantage addressed through accessing free recycled computers from community organisations or gaining

Total First Click/Second Click participants 2007-2008 = 51	
15	Anticipated they would go on to a formal course at TAFE, university or other educational institution
9	First Click participants anticipated they would go on to do Second Click
13	Anticipated they would go on to further informal training
8	Anticipated they would mentor others in their local community
12	Anticipated they would obtain employment as a result of their training in First Click/Second Click