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## MEDIA RELEASE

### TAFE Queensland provides lifeline

When Cheryl Desmarais arrived in Brisbane 34 years ago she never expected to be doing a TAFE Queensland course at the age of 62.

But there are a lot of things that have not gone quite to plan for Cheryl, including separating from her husband, losing her health and then her job.

However Cheryl, who now lives at Common Ground in South Brisbane, said that has all turned around since completing a Certificate II in Business at TAFE Queensland Brisbane.

"I was in a lot of trouble before moving to Common Ground a couple of years ago," Cheryl said.

"I moved to Brisbane with my former husband to raise our children but it didn't take long for things to turn bad.

"Before I moved into Common Ground my health was poor, I didn't have a job and my finances were in a mess.

"But now I am the secretary of the Ekibin Lions Club, I've been offered relief teaching at West End State School and I have a Certificate II in Business."

Common Ground is a not-for-profit organisation that provides supportive housing to meet the growing needs of individuals and families who are at risk of, or experiencing homelessness, or who suffer from a disability, including mental health and addiction.

Employment, Training and Volunteering coordinator at Common Ground, Deb Jones is responsible for organising the TAFE Queensland training for residents.

After finding a small surplus in her funding, Deb decided to arrange training through the South Bank campus of TAFE Queensland Brisbane.

"I contacted TAFE Queensland and asked if we could arrange training for some of our residents," Deb said.

"We wanted the training to be held at Common Ground and we asked if TAFE Queensland could supply laptops for the participants.

"They have been absolutely fantastic and supplied us with everything we asked, including the best teacher possible.

"When the original teacher pulled out the night before the course I couldn't believe it. But then Daryl appeared - he was like a white knight riding in to save the day."

Previously a member of the Army Special Forces, Daryl Kirkhope ran the course for TAFE Queensland Brisbane at Common Ground and said it was a rewarding experience for everyone involved in the program.

"Given the diverse backgrounds and previous education levels of the students it was quite a challenge," Daryl said.

"I've never taught a group like that before but it was extremely rewarding.

"They were all so keen to learn and I'd definitely do it again."



Both Cheryl and Deb said the benefits of working with TAFE Queensland Brisbane extended well beyond the education the residents have received.

"It's brought some of the residents out of their shells," Deb said.

"One in particular had always kept to himself and didn't interact with the others in the building at all. Now he is really involved and much more approachable."

For Cheryl it has opened a number of doors.

"The President of the Lions Club asked me if I could do a spreadsheet for him for an event we were holding," Cheryl said.

"Previously I wouldn't have had a clue but I was so proud to tell him that I could do it.

"The skills I've learnt will also help me when I get some relief teaching work.

"I really can't thank TAFE Queensland and Daryl enough.

"Doing this course has meant everything to me and I'm well on my way to getting my life back on track."

**ENDS**

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