



Disability staff needed in our ageing state

THE state's ageing population and international changes to the way care is offered to people with disabilities is causing a shortage of skilled disability support workers.

The South Australian Learning Centre at Minda, a key registered training organisation for the disability sector, will train an estimated 1000 new workers in disability services this year to help meet the demand for workers.

It is the second year it has offered accredited training to the community, as previously it has only trained staff already employed at Minda.

Senior manager Muriel Kirkby said many existing carers were "baby boomers" who wanted to retire in coming years, so new workers needed to be trained now.

But the demand was also related to Australia's ratification of the 2006 United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, she said.

The convention is designed to promote, protect and ensure human rights and fundamental freedoms for all people with disability.

It means people with disabilities

will have greater choice in where they live, who they live with, who supports them and how they are supported.

Ms Kirkby said past practice had placed people with disabilities into a general program or care schedule. "We have got a population of people who are ageing, on top of having an intellectual disability or having a mental illness," she said.

"The training need at the moment has gone absolutely through the roof. "It's really exciting times for us - it's grown pretty quickly."

She said SALC was forced to double its workforce from four to eight instructors this year to keep up with the demand.

It offers training for students to achieve a Certificate III and Certificate IV in aged care or disability work and mental health, or a combined program.

Jobs in the field include disability officers, employment co-ordinators, lifestyle support co-ordinators, residential care officers, mental health workers and community care workers. SALC also offers a Diploma in Disability Work, which can lead to careers as managers, senior disability workers, program co-ordinators

and case managers.

"The reality is there hasn't always been a career path and we're trying to influence and promote the disability sector as a career option," she said.

Ms Kirkby said it encouraged school leavers who did not have the aptitude to go straight to university from school to start by studying for a certificate. It also wants to help students go on to further study and use their training to count towards a Bachelor Degree in Disability and Community Rehabilitation, opening up career pathways for students.

Edda Ienco, 52, completed a Certificate 3 in disability work last year and is already working with residents at Minda. "I always had an interest to help people help themselves and help people's lives, as well as improve my own through the work and get satisfaction out of it," she said.

It was a worthwhile job to see clients develop, she said.

"It is challenging," she said.

"Some clients are more challenging than others . . .but it is rewarding to say 'I've achieved something'."



INTERACTION: Care Worker at Minda Edda Ienco with Minda resident Jimmy Grosvenor and Animal Support Program dog Tully. Picture: MICHAEL MARSHALL