

DISTANCE EDUCATION REPORT

Jo Murphy

The Distance Education Portfolio has had a very productive year producing videos, flyers, surveys, a research paper and media releases all focused on increasing the general awareness of our current lobby; The Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA), an allowance aimed at giving financial recognition to the vital role of the distance education tutor, for those families in receipt of the Assistance for Isolated Children, Distance Education allowance.

1500 families across Australia use distance education because of where they live, there is no other option to school their children. As outlined in our recent research paper, in 85% of cases, distance education is delivered by the mother. This role requires families to ensure either the mother or a governess, is available to commit between 6-8 hours per day, five days a week to the classroom to deliver the content of the program. The tutor is the lifeline between the children and the Distance Education Centre.

The short film produced during our Conference last year, was a fantastic resource, outlining the need for the establishment of DETA and also focused on the technological barriers hindering the education of rural and remote children. We submitted the finished product for consideration in the Society for the Provision of Education in Rural Australia (SPERA) Annual Australian Rural Education Awards and were granted a Citation Award. Thanks must go to all last year's conference participants for their contribution to this significant resource.

Towards the end of last year Federal Council surveyed members, aiming to gather vital statistics from the isolated families using distance education, to present to government. Thank you to all survey participants, we had a fabulous response and are finding that social media and emails are opening up communication channels with members. This information was then used to generate the paper, Distance Education Research – Geographically Isolated Families, November 2015.

The research document was distributed to many politicians during our delegation to Canberra in November. The research was well received and enlightened Ministers and Advisers yet again, as to the need for greater support for families educating their children through distance education programs.

In order to raise awareness and showcase how education is delivered to children who cannot access a school due to living in isolated location, the Distance Education Portfolio saw a need for visual content to demonstrate this mode of education. Federal Council welcomed a generous grant from the Commonwealth Department of Education and Training, to embark on a short film outlining distance education in the bush. We hope that this video creates a greater understanding of how distance education actually works for the families of isolated Australia. The production offers a valuable insight to the lives of two North Western Queensland families, both educating their children through Mount Isa School of the Air (which is typical of DE or SOTA schools throughout Australia). One uses a governess as the home tutor and the other, as in the case of around 85% of our member families, shows the mother as the dedicated home tutor.

The 8 minute video is a snapshot of the commitment required to undertake this mode of education and delves into the tasks required by a mother in a typical rural setting <https://youtu.be/dFqc0StaORE>. We encourage you to take a few minutes to watch this [video](#) and review the research document, [Distance](#)

[Education Research Geographically Isolated Families](#) , November 2015 in order to support the mums and dads living in rural and remote Australia and provide what is required to overcome the current inequities.

Key findings from the research paper:

- 85% of members surveyed have the mother as distance education tutor
- These women commit between 35 – 45 hours per week of unpaid time to tutoring their children, acting as the vital lifeline between the Distance Education Centre and the student.
- Filling the role of the Distance Education Tutor means that a person cannot take part in paid employment or fill a role in their business.
- This role is often filled for a minimum of 6-10 years, up to 21 years in the case of a large family.

Most recently, we have been networking with the National Rural Health Alliance, who have been most generous with their Graphics Department support and produced a fabulous flyer for the DETA lobby. The portfolio trusts that with our collection of resources and following up on offers of support, we are gathering momentum in support of this vital allowance.