

# Isolated Children's Parents' Association Qld Inc.

## ICPA QLD INC. – BRIEF HISTORY

ICPA was formed in Bourke NSW on April 16 1971 when founder Mrs Patricia Edgley MBE called a meeting to discuss the closing of the Bourke School Hostel. It was here, in the middle of a widespread drought, that the Bourke Branch of what was to become the Isolated Children's Parents' Association was formed. Pat Edgley became the inaugural Secretary and Wally Mitchell the chairman.

The first Queensland ICPA branch was formed at Cunnamulla on 28 June 1971 followed by Kindon, Dirranbandi and Bollon soon after. On 1<sup>st</sup> October 1971 branches from all over Australia came together (17 in total), once again in Bourke, to form a Federal Council of ICPA. The Association's initial objective was 'to obtain equal justice for every school child isolated by distance'. A constitution was adopted and the formation of State Councils soon followed. The Queensland Council was the first State Council of ICPA to be formed on Melbourne Cup Day, 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1971 in Charleville. The inaugural President was Mr EC 'Bunny' Powne (Bollon). ICPA Qld Inc. now has 45 branches in Queensland and over 1200 member families.

The educational difficulties of the day, for inland Australia, were also being widely publicised on ABC radio, regional and national. On the back of this extensive coverage the association grew rapidly.

The tasks of the new association grew as understanding increased about the many areas where isolated students were having difficulty accessing their education services. ICPA soon found itself dealing with Correspondence Schools and Schools of the Air, school bus runs, hostels, small remote schools, special needs education and communication. In the early years of incorporation, the organisation was not financial, therefore State and Federal councillors, for a number of years, paid their own way to attend meetings with the department in Canberra and Brisbane.

The first major achievement of ICPA was the introduction of the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) scheme by the then Federal Minister for Education Mr Kim Beasley Snr, in January 1973. The late Sir Alan Fletcher (then Qld Minister for Education) and later ICPA Qld's first patron, drafted the AIC guidelines, which made it much easier for the Commonwealth Government to run with it. Up until this time, very little attention had ever been paid to education in the bush. There was no voice speaking up for the rights and specific education requirements needed for children in rural and remote parts of Australia.

In 1978 a National Task Force commenced an inquiry into the feasibility of a Domestic Satellite for Australia. ICPA Qld and its members provided comprehensive evidence for the educational potential of a satellite communications system. For some time ICPA remained the most informed and influential rural group in satellite matters as it was seen as a means of providing educational services unparalleled in rural areas as well as a huge leap forward in rural communications from existing (or non-existent) services.

In 1983-85 ICPA Qld was heavily involved in the restructuring and incorporation of Correspondence Schools and Schools of the Air into one School of Distance Education. Current ICPA Qld Patron and then President Mrs Patricia Mitchell OAM was a member of the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Distance Education which travelled throughout Queensland consulting on proposals to improve the delivery of education in isolated areas. New funding was provided to build new SDE centres in Charters Towers and Longreach. Over time SDE's have transitioned to meet the needs and wants of a much wider cohort of students, and since 2015 ICPA Qld have had to vigorously advocate to remind government of the original and vital purpose of these centres as geographically isolated

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students are being overwhelmed by the home schoolers of choice, single subject selectors and medical and behavioural enrolments.

One of the most significant lobby successes of ICPA Qld was the introduction of the Living Away From Home Allowance Scheme (LAFHAS) in 1985. This allowance, which is still in place today, provides financial assistance for students who have no reasonable access to a school and have to live away from home. The scheme subsidises tuition and travel expenses. Students with disability requiring education away from home are also eligible for compensation via the Remote Area Disability Supplement component of the LAFHAS. In January 2015, following a longstanding campaign by ICPA Qld over a number of years, the LNP Education Minister John Paul Langbroek announced an increase to the LAFHA Scheme to further assist families, in light of the Yr 7 move to secondary in Queensland. The Minister acknowledged the increase was a direct result of the ICPA Qld lobby. Despite this increase, ICPA Qld continues to advocate for an increase in the LAFHAS on an ongoing basis to reflect the actual costs of education to ensure families are able to meet the ever increasing costs and not be forced to make decisions that are potentially detrimental to the learning outcomes of their children.

In 2002, following a number of Queensland branch motions, the School of Distance Education hardware allowance of \$250 per family (p/year) was introduced to all geographically isolated families to assist with the purchase and maintenance of home schoolroom computer equipment. This was followed by an announcement by then Education Minister Anna Bligh at the 2003 Queensland conference in Cunnamulla that eligible families would also receive an annual subsidy of \$500 per family to assist with broadband internet services. ICPA Qld successfully lobbied the LNP for a further increase in these subsidies on the basis that the newly introduced Australian Curriculum created a significant increase in the use of technology in the home schoolroom. An increase to a per student rate was announced in 2013.

In 2005, after a three year trial and more than twenty years of lobbying by ICPA, By-Passing became a policy of Education Qld. Significant community consultation was sought during the trial period and ICPA Qld was heavily involved. Then President Mr Jack Beach accompanied department personnel on a 'road trip' to discuss concerns with members of the community. 'By-Passing' meant that secondary schools in small communities who fulfilled certain enrolment and distance criteria could be 'by-passed' and families could be subsidised (via the LAFHAS and AIC) for students to attend secondary school in a larger centre. The reasoning behind the policy was to aid year 12 completion rates and also retain families in small rural towns. By-Passing continues to be successfully implemented today.

ICPA Qld was named as a Q150 State Shaper Icon in 2009, the year of Queensland's 150<sup>th</sup> birthday. This was a considerable honour for the organisation.

The implementation of the Australian Curriculum in Queensland in 2011 and the subsequent Curriculum into the Classroom (C2C) materials saw a major shift in the way distance education was delivered in Queensland. ICPA Qld developed a C2C Distance Education Reference Group at the 2012 Goondiwindi State Conference in response to the widespread discontent with the new materials, which had been introduced with very little consultation or trial. This group was instrumental in providing advice and feedback on the suitability of curriculum materials in the rural and remote home schoolroom and can be credited for making a major contribution to the improvement of the user-friendliness and quality assurance of Distance Education curriculum materials. ICPA Qld continue to monitor the curriculum and Distance Education materials to ensure continued rewrites occur and materials remain current and accessible.

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As a result of a Richmond branch motion at the Charters Towers State Conference in 2010, Qld State Council lobbied the State Government for a distance education based program to provide equality for children who were geographically isolated from an early childhood centre. In 2013 the eKindy program was rolled out and is now firmly entrenched in the Distance Education syllabus.

ICPA's support for small remote schools, often located miles from towns has resulted in improvements to bus services, access to wider curriculum such as music and sport delivered by visiting specialist teachers, and an improvement in departmental understanding of the needs of children and teachers in these small communities.

While ICPA may be relatively small numerically, it is a highly effective and respected political lobby group. This is primarily because the organisation has always refrained from asking for assistance or programs which cannot be justified in terms of fairness and equity for all concerned. ICPA does not want a better deal than our urban counterparts, only access to a quality educational service equivalent to those available in major cities and towns.

