

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN STATE CONFERENCE REPORT

by Jenny Gosling, *Publicity Officer*

THE Annual State Conference in South Australia was held at Port Augusta at the Stand Pipe Golf Motor Inn on the 20th March 1999. Eighty two people attended the conference hosted by the Port Augusta Branch. Newly appointed Department of Education, Training and Employment (DETE) representatives, Mr John Halsey, Executive Director of Country Services and Mr Geoff Spring CEO, were among many important guests for the day.

In his address to Conference, Mr Halsey outlined his new position and reported on the findings to date of consultations with schools, parent groups and communities in assessing ways to improve the educational outcome for students living in country areas of South Australia. There are many complex issues that make up the whole picture of education in the country compared to the metropolitan schools but, with some understanding of the impact that distance has on different locations, we can begin to see ways of overcoming each point made during these broad consultations. Members of ICPA feel confident in working with Mr Halsey and Mr Spring to change aspects of education specific to country areas of South Australia. ICPA South Australia commends Education Minister, Mr Malcolm Buckby for his initiative in creating this new position for Country Services.

Centrelink representatives from Adelaide, Mr Dylan Walker and Mrs Marg Bautista from Cannington, WA, answered many questions during debating of motions at Conference and we welcome their input every year. A panel of guests, including Mr Halsey, Mr Spring, Caroline

Schaefer MLC, Centrelink reps, Principal of the Open Access College (Marg Beagley) and Head of Boarding at Westminster School (Mr Graham Brown) took part in question time for 45 minutes during conference, with many challenging questions and valuable discussion on a wide range of issues.

Life Membership was presented to two longstanding members of ICPA, Mrs Lynn Nagel of Port Augusta Branch and Mrs Lorraine Balharry from Far West Branch, representing Penong, Ceduna and Coorabie. Lorraine, who is well known on Eyre Peninsula, was the foundation President of the Far West Branch and held Branch and State positions during her many years of travelling long distances to meetings, State and Federal Conferences. Lynn Nagel has been a member of ICPA since 1973 and represented her Branch on State Council from 1985 - 1997, being State President for 4 years (1988-92). Both ladies have worked hard for ICPA and are great ambassadors for our organisation. Quite a few ICPA members were involved in making sure both Lynn and Lorraine attended Conference. Lynn was much easier as her Branch was hosting the day but others from Far West Branch delighted in using slightly false pretences to lure Lorraine to the Conference and surprise them both with this great honour.

ICPA members at the State Conference commended those Boarding Schools making available special ICPA Scholarships and bursaries, as this is very valuable assistance to families and they are most grateful.

Parents of remote students are seeking from the Government, the reinstatement of the GRIT Grant (Geographically, Remote and Isolated Technology Grant) to the Open Access College, to address the needs of remote students in the delivery of their subjects to help them gain the best possible learning outcome. As new courses are developed, the demand for upgraded computers for Years 5 upward is necessary, but parents are finding these increased costs very difficult if not impossible while rural incomes are at the lowest level ever. The Open Access College has used technology to enhance their courses and lessons to give children some form of social contact with Internet chat, desktop video conferencing, e-mail and other innovative programs. The College is at the forefront of technology in schools in Australia and it is hoped that DETE will afford the College and the students, the means to maintain this level. However, this can only occur if

students have access to up-to-date computers and programs with telephone data speeds that can cope and not jam or drop out while in use.

Other issues debated at Conference included: Lack of Childcare in some rural areas to support local working mothers; and raising the daily Conveyance Allowance for parents travelling to the school bus stop.

Parents also made known their frustration of the inability of their children to qualify for the Youth Allowance, keeping many country and remote students from gaining a tertiary education. Failure to access this allowance means parents are faced with huge costs to live away from home and study for those years. Mr Barry Wakelin, Member for Grey, was reminded of his Governments 1996 election promise of increasing the deduction for farm assets to 75% (currently 50%) has not been implemented. President, Glennis Crawford has recently returned from a delegation with Federal Councillors to Canberra on this issue affecting many parents across Australia.

ICPA would also like to see greater promotion of the availability of the Living Away From Home Allowance for 1st Year Apprentices who must live away from home. Parents have huge costs associated with setting up a son or daughter in their first year away and maybe Centrelink needs to make sure that all parents know of the available allowance.

A great Conference centred around a new direction in assessing the needs of country people in education, was certainly the positive note to come out of South Australia's annual event. ✍



Lorraine Balharry, Far West Branch, was presented with Life Membership at the conference.



Lynn Nagel, Port Augusta branch, was also presented with Life Membership at the conference