

ICPA NT – 2024 President's Report

By Moira Lanzarin

It is with immense pride and humility that I take my turn to stand before you today to present my third annual NT President's Report.

CS Lewis said: *"Children are not a distraction from more important work. They are the most important work."*

Our children are our WHY. Giving our children the best opportunities possible whilst living and working in far flung places across Australia is the heart and soul of ICPA.

By the very nature of our charter - working for geographically isolated children and families - there will always be a need for ICPA. We cannot change the geography or the distance, and nor would we want to. Australia needs families in the bush. Our children are only children for a short period in time. New children are and need to continue to be coming through all the time.

In 2022/23, the NT Government commissioned Deloitte to conduct a review into Secondary Education in the NT. "Complex and Unique" was the general theme from their findings. In fact, the most complex and unique anywhere in the world.

This is something that our members are only too aware of for all stages of education for our children - and something that we regularly reinforce and remind Government and stakeholders when advocating on member's behalf. That families need to be able to be supported to make the best choices possible so that they can educate their child and for their child to thrive.

ICPA is an endurance relay of epic proportions. Every person doing their bit – doing what they can, when they can. Together, carrying on. I love seeing the multi generation support. Wave your hand if you are here today with your mother or father; or your child.

The fact that our volunteer Executive positions are for a fixed term (maximum 3 or 4 years) not only helps alleviate burn-out but it means that ICPA has fresh blood and passion with current lived experience at the helm. This is immensely powerful.

Just as we are all about growing our children and their education – ICPA provides a personal growth journey for parents and teaching staff. I love seeing the increasing confidence and capacity as new members come through, taking their turn in leadership roles, so ably supported by those who have been before. This year I my ICPA time was severely limited and two of our Councillors were dealt extremely dramatic and challenging personal situations. I most sincerely thank my NT State Council for so graciously and capably stepping up and collectively ensuring work continues (regardless of who's job description it is) and that our people are supported and nurtured.

Reliable communications and the equitable funding of these is an ongoing issue for members. Most (especially the remote families) opt for more than one supplier and multiple modes of communications so that one should rarely find themselves in my situation of no communications or connectivity at all.

NT only has 3 branches – Alice Springs & Katherine Branches based around the respective Schools of the Air; and Territory Wide, our Lone's Branch. All three have representatives here with us. My task as NT State President is to lead the State Council in our advocacy to relevant stakeholders about state related issues. I also see my task as a conduit and connecting mechanism between all three groups (Branch, State and Federal ICPA) and our stakeholders.

Hosting the amazing Federal Conference in Darwin last July with the awesome green and blue shirt ladies, nearly seems like a distant memory – and at the same time, only a click of the fingers ago. Organising and hosting does take its toll on one's volunteer hours and last year felt as though we were regularly on catchup for NT State Council core business.

But NT Council did rally, and did achieve some great outcomes of which we can rightly be proud of. We have decentralised delegation and made it into a more fluid process as apposed to single intense blocks of meetings in Darwin. We have met Ministers and Department officials and stakeholders out and about across the Northern Territory. At campdrafts and field days, in offices and coffee shops, on station and by the side of the road. Taking every opportunity given to advocate and progress the concerns and issues of our members. In September we went to Alice Springs and participated in Branch activities, had meetings with local and Federal politicians in their electoral offices and helped celebrate Connellan Airways Trust 40th Anniversary.

Despite, unprecedented weather conditions, we once again flew the ICPA flag at the NT Cattlemen's Annual Conference with an information booth. This exposure and interaction is such an important connection and link between our combined membership base.

At every opportunity possible, I reinforce that one cannot achieve economic development and advancement of the regions without looking after families. And to look after families, one must consider access to EDUCATION (and medical, communications and roads).

Our 2024 NT State Conference – Leaping into Learning, Feb 29 – was so capably hosted by Alice Springs Branch in Alice Springs. We very nearly achieved 100% attendance of state councillors – a feat not yet achieved in my time. Our secretary however was only able to join us virtually from an inland sea of water at Bulloo Downs. Katherine Branch are now actively planning and we are excited to be returning to Katherine for Conference in 2025. (Tues 4th March).

A most useful event on the ICPA annual calendar is the Joint Council President and Secretaries meeting - a weekend of shared learning and strategic connection. This year, instead of it always being hosted and Chaired by Federal Council, we have moved to a rotation among the Councils. Catherine and I welcomed all Councils to Darwin for a most productive weekend. Meeting space was generously provide by Darwin's Haileybury Rendall School and we were able to proudly showcase their amazing facilities. WA have now raised their hand and will host and chair next year. This cross-state collaboration, in person or virtually via, messenger, Zoom and emails is so productive.

Attending Queensland's State Conference in Townsville last month was a huge privilege and a great eye opener for me. I highly recommend attending interstate ICPA conferences if possible.

NT State Council participated in a Values-based, decision-making training session led by Helen Lewis of Decision Design Hub in early 2023. This is a living, evolving piece of work which will help guide us into the future, ensuring we stay relevant, focused and true to purpose. Part of the vision articulated was: *"As an Organisation we are relevant and resilient. We are persistent, strong and powerful in the voice and support we give to GI families which is positive and solution based. Our intelligence, professionalism, integrity and knowledge are respected. We are welcoming, compassionate and inclusive."* Follow up sessions via Zoom this year is expanding this work to develop strategic plans and actions.

We have embraced technology and are now 6 years in to using Google Drive (online cloud storage and capacity) to store and collaborate effectively and efficiently on Council business. This is making a big difference, and we are investigating ways of improvement and upskilling as necessary.

ICPA has helped me grow and develop. Not just in my time as State Treasurer and now President but from a much earlier time too. I consider myself a child of ICPA. My school of the air and boarding school days in North Queensland were all the better because of the advocacy and actions of my Mum and others busy working at a Branch, State and Federal level of ICPA.

We wear multiple hats simultaneously. We are the shareholders, directors and workers of ICPA – all at the same time. This combined with the role of parent, home tutor, business manager, HR department, cook, nurse and jack of all trades – not to mention volunteer members of Landcare, bushfires, campdraft or Cattleman's. This is both our greatest strength and weakness. We are passionate and committed but we are few in numbers and spread very thinly. We speak from the heart and with integrity because it is our lived experience and reality. Our kids are far too important not to. But well-being, burnout and follow up must be carefully managed so that this important juggling act can keep all the necessary balls in the air as required and safely place them down unbroken too.

So if you see things that you think could or should be done better, please also think, "How can I help to do that?"

As I sat to write this report, Telstra was in the middle of transitioning my home area of Mataranka from 3g to 4g service. On our station, unlike many in the Northern Territory, we are close to a small urban development – we are only 11km from town. We have been able to rely on Telstra for all our communications – mobile phone, landline and internet. It has been a good reminder of how totally reliant we become on connectivity (even my ICPA files are primarily stored in the cloud and I needed to refer to my USB backups). But also how liberating it was to not feel the need always know where your device was to deal with emails, messages and be contacted if needed. We were all relieved that the disconnect occurred after all the family were safely back home together after boarding school pickup. By Day 5 of complete connectivity and communication disconnect, that liberating feeling was replaced with annoyance and frustration.

"Bridging the Divide" is such a poignant and powerful metaphor for so much of what ICPA is and does. I thank the Convening Committee and Federal Council for bringing us all together and offering such amazing hospitality and opportunity. The geographically isolated learning experience is so unique and varied. There is so much to share and learn amongst ourselves not to mention with our urban counterparts. In some instances, it is a simple step across but at other times it requires engineering solutions from simple planks or massive constructions to bridge that divide and facilitate fluent traffic between.

Thank you everyone.