



ICPA WA

Isolated Children's Parents' Association Western Australia Inc.



President's Report

WOW! What a year!

Shane Love MLA, Deputy Leader Nationals WA, Peter Rundle MLA, Mrs Roxanne Morrissey – ICPA Federal Life Member and WA Life Member, Mrs Jo Camilleri, Mrs Lisa Slade and Mrs Briony Sinclair representatives from ICPA Federal Council, Guests, Speakers and ICPA members. It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to the 49th Annual Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Western Australia State Conference and to present my report as State President.

Our theme this year is 'Educate not Isolate'. Twelve months ago, in the words of one reporter, "as the world prepares to isolate, the isolated parents come together".

It was Friday 13th and shortly after conference our world as we know it went into lockdown. It certainly was a baptism of fire as I entered my new role as President quenching the media's thirst for interviews. As the whole country navigated its way through the ever-changing COVID-19 pandemic, education and boarding were at the forefront of concerns for parents and families Australia wide. The rapid advancement of COVID-19 resulted in schools closing early and delays in returning to school after holidays. Many decisions regarding travel, access to education and boarding restrictions initially caused a great deal of anxiety to parents and students. I would like to thank the WA Government, the Department of Education, the Department of Transport and relevant representatives for listening to concerns raised by ICPA WA and making adjustments.

Parents and children, all throughout Western Australia were faced with the task of remote online learning at home. It was the beginning of a new education journey for so many people, but one that many ICPA families know so well. Many parents faced different challenges in accessing, facilitating and supervising the online learning, resulting in extra Government resources and an increase in communication technologies being made available. Prime Minister Scott Morrison himself admitted that,

"It's been a lot harder for (younger children) with online learning. It hasn't worked....., it's always best to have children learning in the classroom. That I

don't think is disputed...., "but for kindergarten to Year 6, I think it's even harder for that to work online.

May be now, those that are the decision makers have a better understanding of the struggles faced by families who have no choice other than to do remote learning at home online and maybe they can also appreciate the additional the costs involved by those families who travel great distances to ensure their children access face to face learning. COVID-19 highlighted that although we may have been isolated from one another, it does not mean we are, or indeed need to be isolated from education. COVID-19 show cased that any child can be isolated from accessing education, not just children in remote areas of Australia, "Educate not Isolate".

ICPA WA were involved in a stakeholder review of the return to education by the Department of Education. A number of organisations were represented and ICPA WA ensured the issues that had been created around boarding restrictions, self-isolating requirements and the logistical return to school were clearly understood.

ICPA WA continue to be a part of conversations with the Department of Education looking at ways to maximise the new skills and resources, that have occurred across the whole education sector as a result of COVID-19, to continue to benefit the education of our children.

2020 has certainly been the year to be celebrating our adaptability, resilience, tenacity and determination in all matters relating to education. The years of advocacy by ICPA saw Australia well placed to continue with educating our children during this COVID-19 pandemic. So, thank you to all past and present volunteers.

Throughout 2020 and the ensuing pandemic WA State Council have continued to action motions raised at the 2020 State Conference. The Boarding Away from Home Allowance (BAHA) continues to be high on the agenda for State Council. The BAHA reduction has been explained by the Government as being a necessary part of reducing budgets, however given the February announcement of a budget surplus of \$3.1 billion this year, the continued annual reduction of around \$215,875 seems inequitable for families and students who benefit from this much relied upon allowance.

State Council continues to receive reports from members concerning the Department of Transport, Student Travel Subsidy Scheme (STSS) Fares Allowance and Road Travel Allowance. Despite meetings and many letters from WA State Council the continued reference to a transport hub as a means of rejecting travel subsidy claims, irrespective of the route, the frequency or

even where the transport goes in the complete opposite direction continues to frustrate families.

Both these issues were raised during October delegations with Peter Rundle, Nationals Spokesperson for Education and Donna Faragher, the then Shadow Minister for Education. Other topics of discussion included: the request for additional help with the transition to further education/apprenticeships from the State Government for students post Year 12, Education Funding Model changes to be introduced between now and 2029 using the direct measure of income formulae potentially costing many schools millions of dollars which will impact boarding families and the WA State Government Wander out Yonder program varying eligibility between city and country.

A delegation also met with Hon Sue Ellery, MLC, Minister for Education where discussions were had regarding the Schools of Special Education Needs programs (SSEN) and the need for greater awareness of the assistance available to families, the Government's professional development program offering support to new Principals and the reduction of services to rural schools such as dental therapy vans.

Support for our Schools of the Air and rural schools, and the loss of services is an increasing concern as numbers in rural areas continue to decline with an apparent direct correlation between school numbers and a reduction in programs and services.

The current website format is no longer supported resulting in our website becoming obsolete. Federal Council, together with each State Webmaster, have been working tirelessly on the development of a new website, which is planned go live sometime in April. All states have had the opportunity to provide input and be a part of discussions into their future requirements. Hopefully, the new website will alleviate some of the membership renewal issues that members have been experiencing.

Due to COVID-19 border restrictions there was no face-to-face Federal Joint Councils meeting in February, instead a joint Zoom meeting gave States the opportunity to update Federal on local issues and for all parties to share information.

I would like to thank the outgoing 2020/2021 State Council for their contribution in advocating on behalf of our members. At last year's State Conference, we welcomed two new councillors, Michelle Abbott - Midwest Branch, who also took on the role of State Treasurer and Samantha Greay - Eastern Districts Branch. We have been a smaller council this year and without their hard work and commitment we could not continue. I would like to thank

them for volunteering their time and knowledge to such a worthy organisation, that is so well-respected Australia wide.

Thank you to the WA Department of Education for the support ICPA WA receives in the form of an operating grant for the purpose of advocating for the equity of access to an appropriate education for rural and remote students in Western Australia.

I would also like to thank our members for attending today and representing your branch, for advocating in your areas of IPCA and keeping ICPA relevant and at the forefront. But I do worry, and I have said it before 'Where would we be without ICPA?'

Who would be the voice for our children for allowances and when families or rural schools have issues with internet connectivity to access online programs?

Where would help come from for Early Childhood programs, In-Home care issues, Distant Education, Schools of the Air and Curriculum concerns?

Who would be the voice for our children when there are issues in our small rural schools and a lack of support for principals and who will ensure our post-compulsory students are not overlooked or forgotten in their pursuit of their post Year 12 pathways?

Who is going to be the one **voice** that encompasses all the above? Who would you turn to for help with your concerns? Who is there that would help make a difference? I do not have the answer to these questions which highlights the importance of the role of ICPA in our children's education.

As you listen to our speakers and ponder the theme "educate not isolate" it is important that we too educate those who are not familiar with ICPA and do not isolate them from the vast array of areas that we advocate in. As we have said goodbye to 2020 what is different about 2021. One. Just one. It is just 2020 PLUS 1 and I ask that you consider making 2021 the year of PLUS 1. As an organisation that relies heavily on membership subscription to continue to be **your voice** it would be fantastic if everyone could bring a Plus 1 to membership. This would increase our numbers which is important when advocating for change.

In finishing I wish you all an enjoyable and enlightening day, take the opportunity to ask questions, enjoy the conversations and learn from one another.

Thank you