

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

*It hurts because it matters –
John Green*

As I recently participated in a Zoom meeting with representatives from all state councils to discuss the challenges the current pandemic situation is having on our students, the emotion in the virtual room was intense. Why? Because what has been transpiring hurts us all. And why does it hurt? Because it matters. Because the children we represent, our children, are being dealt more distressing and unfair circumstances as a result of the pandemic and this matters.



important 50 years on. For, if not ICPC, who else is going to ensure our disadvantaged geographically isolated children are considered and their inequities addressed? For ICPC it is all about the children and we do all this because they are who really matter.

Following on from our 50th year in 2022, and the postponed conference held in November, the efforts of Federal Council have not waned and we continue to raise and involve ourselves in representing our members in all portfolios utilising all avenues.

No matter how you look at it, geographically isolated children are disadvantaged. From day one when they often have to be born in a maternity ward hundreds of kilometres from their home, their first journey a long distance drive to a rural or remote home where healthcare is less accessible than in the city, where, as they grow up, any early childhood education or early intervention is virtually unattainable, or, if accessible, often limited compared to their urban counterparts. Then they move on to primary schooling, by distance education or in small rural schools with a lack of resources and isolated from their peers. Many then need to head to boarding school for high school, leaving that home and family for another long journey because it is often just not possible to receive an equitable and holistic education where their parents live and work.

It is not a choice but a necessity to ensure they have access to an equitable education. They are already a disadvantaged cohort from their less than equitable early and primary years of education and this needs to be recognised and addressed and these children need to be nurtured and protected. It is, therefore, heartbreaking and confronting to hear of the unfair and inequitable directives imposed on these, already vulnerable and disadvantaged children, as we negotiate the ongoing pandemic.

What is even more heartbreaking though, is that this is just one story of inequity so often experienced by our geographically isolated children, not only in boarding situations and not only because of the pandemic. It also epitomises and reiterates why ICPC continues to be so



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In the six weeks prior to Christmas last year all motions from conference were actioned and we again held our Geographically Isolated Distance Education (GIDE) Day. Our efforts to assist interstate boarders during the pandemic continued which has now, as mentioned above, morphed into further pressing matters as the pandemic response develops and continues to impact our boarders and their families. We have spent considerable time in the communications field, seeking support for portable device, previously trialled with ICPA families by nbn Co, to be provided and subsidised, as well as connecting with the Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee, whose report was released recently. We look forward to developments that may occur from these activities.

After being heavily involved in the review of the first year of the Tertiary Access Payment, we welcomed improvements to the TAP which have closely aligned to our feedback and recommendations for improvements during the evaluation consultation. Members whose children finished school at the end of 2021 and commenced tertiary education in 2022 are encouraged to access the TAP information on the Services Australia website.

Back to our GIDE campaign, which saw the launch of a longer term, dedicated campaign for further GIDE recognition following our second GIDE Day on the 1st December 2021, I am especially pleased to report on the positive response we recently received from our open letter to Members of Parliament, Senators and other education stakeholders advocating for the need for a Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA) to remunerate those families who dedicate themselves to providing a tutor when their children must be educated by distance education due to their geographic location.

Federal Council also spent numerous hours putting together our 2022-23 pre-budget submission raising long- term requests with costings which highlight that a small investment would go a long way. This is exemplified, in particular, in relation to our long term advocacy for the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Allowance for

3-4 year olds undertaking an approved early childhood education program. After the 2021 Budget pledged to invest \$2 billion in support across the next four years to provide 15 hours per week of quality learning for children in the year before school, irrespective of where they live, a meagre \$4 428 000 over the next four years towards the cost of the less than 250 children per year, across the country, accessing these programs seems quite negligible. I know, of course, in this report I am preaching to the converted!

Perhaps though, the most positive outcomes of the past few months are the connections we have established with the office of the Minister for Regionalisation, Regional Communications and Regional Education and Minister for Emergency Management and National Recovery and Resilience, Senator the Hon Bridget McKenzie, and we continue to raise many topics with her office. We have also been pleased to build and maintain links with Services Australia, the Department of Education, Skills and Employment, the Department of Social Services and the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications, with regular meetings scheduled and direct lines of contact established to ensure our members' messages can be relayed to those who are at the coalface of the topics that impact us. To know that our organisation is seen as a key stakeholder in these spaces is immensely gratifying and Federal Council look forward to building these relationships further.

Federal Council was extremely pleased with the announcement in December of the appointment of the first Regional Education Commissioner, in response to recommendations of the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education (Halsey Review) and the National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy (Naphthine Review). ICPA (Aust) welcomed the appointment of Ms Fiona Nash to this role in December and we have already had the opportunity to connect with her. This is an exciting, significant and valuable development for ICPA and Federal Council look forward, in anticipation, to working closely and regularly with the Commissioner in the future.

I know I began this report on a heart-breaking note but, as the quote says, the bittersweet truth is that 'it hurts because it matters' and for us to be able succeed in addressing the inequities faced by our geographically isolated children, because they matter oh so much, it is the relationships, connections and opportunities to raise our concerns and tell our stories that will ultimately see these issues that matter, recognised and hopefully rectified.

As I come to a close, a reminder to you, our members, on behalf of Federal Council, you all matter too and being isolated should not mean you are alone.

Alana Moller
Federal President

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