

## **2021 President's Report**

### **Distinguished guests and fellow members of ICPA.**

Keep your eyes and thoughts on the children, They have no union, they cannot strike, they have no power – they deserve our thinking and our deepest reflections. Wise words from Dr Lilian Katz – ICPA (Aust) Conference, Brisbane 1974.

This is the third State Conference to be held in Hay – with the very fitting theme of Thrive in Isolation!

ICPA-NSW over the past 24 months, since our last conference, has been working tirelessly on many issues around the 13 portfolios in State Council and we have managed to stay very active considering the challenges of COVID these past 12 months.

Last year, due to the cancelled conference, we had to find a way to work around our Constitution which restricted us from voting on conference motions via postal or electronic means. The AGM in Griffith on 6 February has now rectified those restrictions, but last year whilst many of the repeat issues were already in policy, we asked our branches to advise us, in writing, if they considered their new matter to be urgent and based on that advice we raised it as an 'issue' for their area. This way, we still represented our members with the NSW Government and stakeholders during 2020.

Despite having to cancel our Conference, whilst we were in Moree, we took the opportunity to hold the AGM via teleconference. This ensured that we remained constitutional and also gave us the opportunity to present Caroline McDonald with a Certificate of Appreciation for all her hard work that she has done for State Council.

We would like to acknowledge the generosity of FRRR, who in the spirit of 'tackling tough times' allowed the grant received by Moree branch to be used to pay expenses relating to the cancelled conference - it ensured that local businesses such as caterers and motels were not financially burdened from the cancellation. Moree, like most of NSW in recent years, has been through a tough time with the drought and FRRR really helped out. This assistance then allowed for all conference registrations to be reimbursed. Thanks again to the FRRR for offering to transfer left over funds from the Moree conference to Hay.

These photos were taken on our 2019 SYDNEY Deputation, and Instead of deputation to Sydney last year, there have been letters written and more online meetings, in particular State Council has met with NSW Education Standards Authority on the Curriculum review, The NSW Department of Education on the Rural and Remote Survey and Transport for NSW on the school drive subsidy (very pleasing to see ICPA-NSW quoted and a recommendation on the need for a preschool drive subsidy in the recent NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into Drought). ICPA-NSW has participated in five Parliamentary inquiries – Support for Drought affected Communities, the Inquiry into outcomes based funding, the review of the NSW Curriculum,

the inquiry into the future development of the NSW Tertiary Education Sector and the **Health** outcomes and access to **health** and hospital services in rural, regional and remote **New South Wales**. ICPA-NSW has given evidence at three of these inquiries. These inquiries are important way for our members voices to be heard by the resulting recommendations.

We did of course deal with the ongoing issues that COVID-19 threw at us on a daily basis. This has been particularly challenging to manage as we found ourselves catching policy on the run. NSW is a State sandwiched by three other States and last year felt the full impact of closed borders on all fronts and this has had a huge impact on the ability for children to access their education, not to mention the children who also attend boarding school within NSW.

The NSW Minister for Education was extremely quick to assist when we raised the issue of social distancing capacity in the NSW State boarding schools and they found ways to get all children back to those schools in a very timely manner.

The annual deputation to Sydney was replaced by a trip to Dubbo, whereby State Council split into groups and held back to back zoom meetings with Ministers, MPs, Stakeholders and Departments. We had 32 meetings over two days ensuring that the current Policy of ICPA-NSW members and also current issues that were to be raised at the cancelled moree conference were still raised.

Some of the areas that ICPA-NSW would like to see some improvements on as a matter of priority are in the Early Childhood space – with each child recommended to complete 600 hrs of preschool in their first year of schooling – how do rural and remote families achieve this? For two years we have had positive discussions with transport for NSW around a school drive subsidy for preschoolers but our members would like to see this actually being enacted. With dwindling numbers in rural and remote areas, we continue to advocate for the numbers required to start a bus run to be reduced. Teacher incentives to work in rural and remote schools continue to be important and it is pleasing to see the continuation of the Rural Experience Programme that encourages experienced teachers to leave their city post for a year to bring their experience to rural and remote schools.

With many children home schooling last year, access to better communication was highlighted, NBN Skymuster introduced Skymuster Plus which gave families access to more data - live streaming was unmetered – meaning that data is not metered for online platforms such as zoom and Microsoft teams. At the same time, ICPA-NSW had an increase in members concerned about mobile connectivity. ICPA-NSW continues to advocate for Distance Education children who are having connectivity interruptions. It is increasingly harder for tertiary students to live away from home to access their studies and COVID 19 also highlighted just how restrictive the Youth Allowance rules are for Independent Youth Allowance.

COVID definitely changed the way ICPA-NSW does our business. We found ourselves having to pivot quickly when matters occurred, especially when it came to the border closures as you will hear later in the conference.

Instead of long media releases, we used social media to get out quick and to the point messages. Instead of letter writing or even emails it was a text to a ministers aid or department authority.

But when you think about what was achieved in terms of ICPA's advocacy, it is testament to the good work of all those before us, many of whom are in this room today. Without your tenacity and good reputation built over many years, I do not think what was achieved last year in terms of the #nobordersforboarders campaign would have been achieved.

Our priority is to encourage young families to join and also keep our families whose children have completed tertiary. We see 2021 as the year of, on the back of all the publicity we received last year, building our memberships so that many can thrive in isolation.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the remarkable team of Councillors on ICPA-NSW State Council. Despite their own challenges with Drought, Bushfires and family commitments, they continue to inspire me every day with their willingness to volunteer to help our members. The life of a State Councillor means that every single day you do something for ICPA-NSW. It might be whilst in the sheep yards hanging off one bar of phone service, in the car, late at night whilst everyone is asleep, or during family events, on the tractor, on Mothers or Father day, it doesn't matter what day it is, every day there is a team of people doing something selfless for our members.

Thank you also to Alana Moller and her Federal team for being supportive mentors to us throughout what was a very challenging year. The unwavering support from ICPA (Aust) has been such an incredible strength to us in NSW.

I will leave you with a wonderful little quote from the letter written to us last year by our Patron, Her Excellency Margaret Beazley AC QC Governor of New South Wales ***“take care of yourselves and thank you again for living the challenge of being in isolated communities with such good humour and such big hearts”***

Claire Butler

President ICPA-NSW