

Isolated Children's Parents' Association submission to the National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education

The Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia Incorporated [ICPA (Aust)] welcomes the opportunity to respond to the NATIONAL INQUIRY INTO RURAL AND REMOTE EDUCATION. The submission will provide some of the early history of the Association and then deal with the concerns and issues of our members Australia wide.

The formation of ICPA in 1971, led by a dynamic lady, Mrs Pat Edgley MBE, came as a result of the closure of the Bourke school term hostel and Australia experiencing a rural recession of a magnitude not experienced for many years and recurring drought conditions over a prolonged period. With rising production costs, reduced commodity returns and limited job opportunities throughout rural and remote Australia many rural and remote families were moving into larger towns seeking employment.

This economic downturn made it difficult and in some cases, impossible for parents to meet the rising costs associated with children attending boarding institutions. (The ensuing years has seen an escalation of this scenario into other commodity sectors, and well beyond, with the continued erosion of the social and physical infrastructure in many rural and remote towns.)

ICPA (Aust) is a voluntary national parent body dedicated to ensuring that all geographically isolated students have equality with their non-isolated peers of access to an appropriate education. The Association has over 3,300 member families, residing in the more remote parts of Australia, who all share a common concern of gaining access to education for their children and the provision of services required to achieve this. Membership includes a cross section of Australia's rural and remote population and includes fishermen, miners, itinerant employees, farmers, pastoralists and small business owners.

It is interesting to note that in a CSIRO survey in 1973 lack of schooling and opportunities for education were given as the greatest contributing factor towards the decision of families to leave rural and remote parts of Australia and this is still applicable today.

When it was formed in 1971, ICPA sought the continuance and enrichment of the Correspondence school system and a "Living Away from Home Allowance" for children who must leave home and live away from family in order to obtain their education because of their geographic isolation.

- ➔ • ***Today the goal of ICPA (Aust) is to seek for ALL geographically isolated children the same access to education and equal educational opportunities from pre-school to tertiary which can be readily obtained by their non isolated peers. Their educational outcomes should not be limited because of where they live.***

ICPA (Aust) represents families who live in rural and remote parts of Australia and lobbies to ensure that the children of these families have access to a continuing and appropriate education in order to reach their individual optimal educational potential

through the following policy areas.

- Country Areas Program
- Special Education
- School Term Hostels
- Small Rural and Remote Schools
- Curriculum
- Boarding Schools
- Early Childhood Education
- Education Allowances
- Travel
- Post Compulsory (Tertiary) Education
- Communications
- Distance Education

In recognition of the problems faced by geographically isolated families in gaining access to education the Federal Government introduced the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Scheme on the 17th January 1973. This is a non-means tested allowance, which is directed at getting the student to the school gate whether it be by: -

- ***Boarding Allowance*** (originally set at 55% of the average boarding fee Australia wide)
- ***Correspondence Allowance*** (now known as Distance Education Allowance) to help parents set up and maintain a school room or a
- ***Second Home Allowance*** by which a family may set up a second home in a city or regional centre to give the children the opportunity of living with a parent or a family member and having access to school on a daily basis.
- ***An Additional Boarding Allowance*** that is subject to a means test.

In 1994 Sher and Sher ('Beyond the Conventional Wisdom: Rural Development as if Australia's Rural People and Communities Really Mattered' Journal of Research in Rural Education, Spring, 1994, Vol. 10, No. 1, pp 2 -43) when asked to prepare a paper that would focus on strategies for advancing 'rural development,' alerted those who cared to listen, to the fact that there was no rural development policy in place. Sher and Sher lamented that they could not find a single source that convincingly captured the realities of Australia existing beyond the nations cities and suburbs.

It is patently obvious that while a highly educated rural and remote population can facilitate both ecologically and economically sustainable growth, such a scenario begs the question as to whether this can continue to happen if the direction set as a result of this consultation (to rebuild the value and contribution of the education system across Australia) does not enjoy bipartisan support. Australian children would be best served if politics were left out of education and learning outcomes had a greater focus on them.

In 1997 at the 26th Federal ICPA Conference, members called on the Federal and State Governments to implement processes that require a rural impact assessment and

statement be carried out and attached to every policy paper and cabinet submission affecting the policy areas of importance to rural communities.

AVAILABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY OF BOTH PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLING

1 DISTANCE EDUCATION

Students of families living in rural and remote areas of Australia, that are isolated from schools or a school bus service are educated by Distance Education or School of The Air mode for primary school. Many students are now studying secondary schooling through Distance Education Centres and Open Access Colleges such as the Perth based, Schools of Isolated and Distance Education (SIDE) and Open Access College in South Australia. There is a concern that adequate funding is not available in these centres to allow technology to be provided for these rural and remote isolated students. This leads to a large gap in technology programs, which are a very important part of learning and provide vital support to the curriculum.

The success of Distance Education is dependent upon the Distance Education teacher, the lesson materials, supervisor and the student.

The supervisor plays a vital role in primary distance education, in the organisation of the lesson materials, explanation of what is required in the lesson as well as completing written responses for the teacher as to what the student is achieving and how they are handling the lesson materials.

If the supervisor (usually the mother) has limited literacy and numeracy skills, they cannot effectively help the student with the lessons. Most isolated rural and remote supervisors who are teaching their students by Distance Education delivery mode have no prior teaching degrees or experience. In some cases there may be too many demands on the supervisor such as working on the property, supervising the lessons, and caring for preschoolers as well. This is compounded by curriculum overload, the same that all trained teachers experience, but with less support for the supervisor / rural and remote teacher. In these cases some parents decide in the interest of their children's education to board them away from home for primary years. For some families this means they are placed in a very difficult financial position trying to access an appropriate education for their children. Scenarios such as this show that there is little or no choice for those families in isolated rural and remote areas when they cannot cope with Distance Education.

- ➔ • *Educational materials for students studying via the Distance Education mode must be continually updated with changes to the curriculum and user friendly for an unqualified home tutor (usually the mother)*
- ➔ • *The future introductions of voice and data technology into Distance Education systems must be comprehensively trialed and evaluated before*

being implemented. The relevant departments must take into consideration the home situations of many isolated rural and remote students, (eg fencing camps, no access to telephones, no access to power). These students should not be disadvantaged in the program they receive.

In being a signatory to the International Convention on the Rights of the Child – second reading in December 1988 in Article 28 in certain paragraphs it is stated;

States Parties recognise the right of a the child to education, and with a view to achieving the right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular

a) make primary education compulsory and free to all:

b) encourage the development of different forms of secondary education including general and vocational education, make them available and accessible to every child and take appropriate measures such as the introduction of free education and offering financial assistance in case of need

<i>Isolated rural and remote students are the ones who miss out</i>
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2 SMALL RURAL AND REMOTE SCHOOLS

Students of families in rural and remote areas use the local primary schools in the local towns or areas. Many children living in these areas travel by bus to the schools. There is a real concern that as these rural and remote schools close down through the lack of student numbers and a trend towards bigger and more centralised schools, many children will be forced to travel for longer periods. This can be detrimental to their education, bearing in mind that a number of children, as young as five, already travel up to three hours a day. Another scenario is that the children could be forced to go onto Distance Education. This does not always suit a families circumstance for a variety of reasons and work commitments.

In small communities the school is an integral part of the community. It is often the centre of many activities – both educational and social. It is essential that support and maintenance of these schools continues. ICPA (Aust) therefore seeks to ensure the continuity of delivery of quality educational services to students in rural and remote schools and pre-schools.

3 SECONDARY EDUCATION

The majority of students, who have been on Distance Education for their primary years or have attended an isolated rural and remote small school, choose to board away from home to access an urban, city or large regional high school. This is done to improve students social and interaction skills and because secondary schooling is generally beyond a supervisors ability to help effectively. These students are eligible for Assistance for Isolated Children's (AIC) Scheme if they meet the criteria of: -

- the principal family home is at least **56 km** from the nearest appropriate government school

OR

- the principal family home is at least **16km** from the nearest appropriate Government

school AND at least **4.5km** from the nearest available transport to that school.

OR

- the student does not have reasonable access to an appropriate government school for at least 20 days of the school year because of adverse travelling conditions (impassable roads), OR the travel time for the return journey to school is at least 3 hours per day

OR

- in some other exceptional circumstances including the child's health related condition or special educational need.

The AIC was originally set at 55% of the average boarding fee in 1973 and has only been at that level once since 1991. At present it is slightly below the 55% and with anticipated increases of at least 5% in boarding fees next year, unless there is a corresponding increase in the AIC, this allowance will erode once again and many isolated rural and remote families will have difficulty in coping with the added financial costs of getting their children to the school gate.

- ➔ • ***It is urgent that the Basic Boarding Allowance of the AIC is legislated and indexed to the Average Boarding Fee (ABF) and not inflation, immediately.***

4 BOARDING FACILITIES

Boarding facilities, at a government, non government school or a school term hostel, play a large and important part in ensuring that primary and secondary children from rural and remote areas are able to access a school education,

To assist with the financial burden these isolated rural and remote families experience in educating their children the Assistance for Isolated Children's Scheme should have: -

- ➔ • ***The provision of a non-means tested Basic Boarding Allowance component equivalent to 55% of the Average Boarding Fee, indexed annually to that fee.***
- ➔ • ***The provision of a means tested Additional Boarding component in the allowance for those in need, graded up to the level of the Average Boarding Fee Australia wide.***
- ➔ • ***The provision of a Second Home AIC component equivalent to the Basic Boarding AIC Allowance for those families who need to establish a second home to provide daily access to an appropriate school for their children.***

4a) School Term Hostels

Short term emergency funding for school term hostels experiencing significant difficulty was granted by the Federal government in 1998 . There is an urgent need for a long term solution to be found through MCETYA (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs) for these school term hostels to remain viable and provide essential boarding facilities for isolated rural and remote students to access

education.

The April 1984 Commonwealth Schools Commission document 'Funding Policies for Australian Schools' notes that there were special problems associated with the School Term Hostel and Boarding Schools serving isolated children (page 59). One of these was the fact that isolated children were frequently required to cross State borders in order to access school, be it via Distance Education or boarding facilities. States had some difficulty funding students from other states to their own schools. An example of this was the Goondiwindi QLD School Term Hostel, which did not receive Queensland Government recurrent funding for their hostel for the students who came from NSW etc.

The Commonwealth Schools Commission report said that additional recurrent support from Commonwealth and State Governments was required. It proposed that the Commonwealth and State governments negotiate agreements covering the additional needs of such isolated (AIC) children. It proposed that there be a supplementary per capita grant for each isolated (AIC) student resident at the institution and that the institution be fully accountable for the manner of its expenditure for the support of isolated AIC students.

An alternative approach was for the Commonwealth to provide an equivalent figure for division among the States according to their enrolment of isolated children at school term hostels, with matching State contributions. Such an approach would be similar to current provisions for other areas of need provided through Commonwealth specific purpose programs, for example Special Education.

It should be noted that non-government school term hostels provide the only access to free government primary and secondary schools and that these schools are the ones most likely to be used by isolated families in severe and prolonged financial difficulties.

ICPA (Aust) seeks;

- ➔ • *that State and Federal governments recognise school term hostels as providing 'education access' for geographically isolated students and provide recurrent funding on an equitable and regular basis for each AIC student enrolled.*
- ➔ • *that the Commonwealth Department of Education Training and Youth Affairs, in accordance with its 'needs' charter provide a special form of assistance to supplement the State recurrent funding to all boarding facilities which offer special facilities, pastoral care and curriculum to support the education of geographically isolated students.*
- ➔ • *that 'education access' facilities be exempt from fringe benefits tax on notional benefits provided for residential supervisory and tutorial staff on duty or call on the premises.*
- ➔ • *that capital funding for establishment, extension or upgrading of school term hostels, by both State and Federal governments, be on a recognisable rather than 'ad hoc' basis, e.g.. \$1 raised by the group establishing, extending or upgrading the hostel is matched by a \$2 grant from both State and Commonwealth departments of Education.*

**THE COSTS FOR FAMILIES ASSOCIATED WITH EDUCATION
FOR CHILDREN IN RURAL AND REMOTE AREAS**

The cost to achieve access to education for children in the bush is expensive and high compared with those in urban areas.

5 **DISTANCE EDUCATION /SCHOOL OF THE AIR COSTS** for children being educated at home include the following;

- Cost of setting up and maintaining a school room.
- The cost of running the generator for extended hours to provide power for necessary 'power driven' school items. Eg computers and radios for On Air lessons.
- Travel to compulsory school and extra curricula activities and added expenses involved with rental of accommodation and extra travelling expenses for parents to keep in contact so that the family unit is kept strong are examples of additional expenses.

5a **Geographically Isolated Parent's School Supervisors and Child Carer (GIPSSACC) Allowance.**

For geographically isolated families support for education at home is a critical issue.

The role of the home supervisor whether it be parent or employed governess has never been greater. An industry downturn right across the board leaves families with no spare cash to support their children in education. Rapid changes in education, with technology, curriculum and course materials leaves those educating children through Distance Education on the back foot, with very little professional development to support and understand the daily program in their home based school. A parent is not always the *best* person to act as a home based supervisor, with their role committed not only to a schoolroom, but other daily and supportive roles. There are parents and children whose personalities clash which does not bode well for a good educational outcome and therefore many are forced into employing outside help at great expense. For some families this is just not an option, with perhaps other financial commitments and more often than not other educational expenses for older siblings.

- ➔ • ***ICPA (Aust) recommends the provision of a GIPSSACC Allowance in recognition of the essential role played by home tutors in Distance Education delivery. Distance Education today is a demanding tole for the home tutor. It is essentially the job of a teacher, without the training or remuneration and usually included with the daily tasks of an isolated mother eg bookkeeping, cooking, helping on the property.***

ICPA (Aust) seeks the GIPSSACC Allowance as a form firstly of respite for the mother, perhaps providing the means to obtain some temporary help with the teaching or

cooking or supervising of the preschooler who needs mothers time as well. Secondly the Allowance could be used as a means for the mother to obtain professional development as travel or accommodation funding to attend relevant seminars, classes etc which would enhance the mother's ability to cater for her student's needs.

CASE STUDY

A parent began teaching her child at the beginning of the child's primary education and did so for 2 years. A personality clash with her child, her own inadequacy of understanding methodology, her time constraints to other roles expected of her as a managers wife presented the family with a very unsatisfactory educational situation. It was a decision to employ a suitable governess at great financial expense and this would not have happened unless there had been some financial generosity from their employer and grandparents of the child. 30% of the family's net income has been allocated to the employment of a governess so that their child can have a positive, rewarding and good educational outcome. The mother has in regard to teaching expressed 'that it is the most overwhelming and daunting thing I have ever done.'

Many parents in this situation are not in the position to receive financial help from employers or grandparents.

6 BOARDING COSTS for those attending a boarding facility

The average boarding cost per student for 1999 at a boarding school is \$8,048 and at a school term hostels is \$5,561. An additional \$6000 per annum for tuition fees if applicable.

There are other expenses that isolated rural and remote families experience such as travelling to attend school functions, often up to 6 and 8 hours plus, over rough roads causing much wear and tear on vehicles.

7 SECOND HOME

As a boarding facility is not a satisfactory alternative for all, some families choose to set up a second home in a larger centre where daily access to a school is available and this option is also very expensive.

8 TERTIARY EDUCATION

Access to tertiary education for students from isolated rural and remote communities involves living away from home for most students. The cost of accessing tertiary studies is always very difficult for the isolated rural and remote families who have already had the financial burden of boarding student costs during the secondary years.

The only assistance available for students at a tertiary level is Youth Allowance. The assets testing in the Youth Allowance and the introduction of the Actual Means Test has effectively excluded many rural and remote families from any form of assistance towards tertiary studies. A survey carried out by Federal Council of ICPA (Aust) in 1997 estimated only 1% of isolated families received the Youth Allowance, while the figure for the general population is said to be 25%.

Educational facilities no matter how well they provide for the needs of the community are of little consequence to those students who cannot access them due to distance and cost. It is a well known fact that the alarmingly low participation rate in tertiary education for rural and remote students was 16% in 1997.

- ➔ • ***ICPA (Aust) seeks the provision of a fair Actual Means Test on the Youth Allowance, modified to ensure that it does not discriminate against rural and remote families.***
- ➔ • ***ICPA (Aust) supports the need to raise the discount on farm/small business income earning assets from 50% to at least 75% for the purposes of determining Youth Allowance eligibility.***
- ➔ • ***ICPA (Aust) seeks that the Department of Family and Community Services recognises that partnerships of husbands and wife, wholly or mainly engaged in primary production should be excluded from the application of the Family Actual Means Test in the same way that sole traders in a similar business are excluded.***
 - ***Salary and wage earners are excluded from FAMT***
 - ***Sole traders involved in primary production are also excluded from FAMT.***

At the beginning of 1998 conditions were modified to allow the two income thresholds in a partnership to be deducted from the FAMT.

Students not eligible for the Youth Allowance have been excluded from accessing the Supplementary Loans scheme - other students have been able to trade in part of their Youth Allowance for a Loan.

- ➔ • ***ICPA (Aust) seeks the implementation of a Loans Scheme, to enable those students not eligible for the Youth Allowance to access tertiary studies.***
The loan would:
 - Not be available to those eligible for the Youth Allowance
 - Be non interest bearing
 - Be structured similarly to a HECS loan and only change in dollar terms in line with movements in the CPI
 - Be repayable on the same basis as the HECS loan
 - Be limited to students who are classified as dependent on their parents for the purpose of determining available means
 - Be available in units of \$500
 - Be available for the academic year commencing 1st January, 2000

See Appendix 3 for Case Studies

<u>THE QUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL ACCESS INCLUDING TECHNOLOGICAL SUPPORT SERVICES</u>
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9 COUNTRY AREAS PROGRAM (CAP)

This Federally funded program has enabled many geographically isolated children to have cultural experiences and tuition that they would not otherwise have had the opportunity to experience. Funds are allocated to States according to a specific formula, and States distribute these funds to geographically isolated districts and/or schools. One of the really positive aspects of this program has been the unique collaboration between education authorities, teachers, parents and community members as they work together to provide cultural, educational and social experiences for children.

For some students, it is 'opening the doors' to a world beyond their environment. The cost of travel and the distances involved prevent many students from seeking experiences beyond their immediate area. The Country Areas Programs have brought these experiences to children through such events as -Music Viva, live theatre and other performances, specialist music/drama tuition, artist-in-residence programs, author tours etc. Sporting days provide the opportunity for children to play team sports or simply to develop skills in these areas. In one State, the teaching of team sport skills and assessment of children's gross motor skills are conducted by travelling teams of sporting specialists.

- ➔ • *ICPA (Aust) therefore seeks the maintenance of the Country Areas Program across the States and the Northern Territory after the expiry of the Commonwealth Quadrennial Agreement - that is, after 2000. ICPA (Aust) would also seek an increase in CAP funding to States and the Northern Territory.*
- ➔ • *CAP must continue to be maintained as a separately identified Commonwealth Targeted program within the area of 'Special Learning Needs'. CAP is the only program which addresses the unique needs of students who are disadvantaged due to geographic isolation. The benefits to students under the Country Areas Program have been demonstrated in the past as:*
 - *being excellent value for money*
 - *helping to generate feelings in small isolated schools of being 'included'.*
 - *enriching the curriculum for schools*
 - *fostering interest in learning*
 - *bringing schools and their communities together in fruitful partnerships*
 - *expanding possibilities for students*
 - *enhancing the social and cultural life of small isolated communities.*

The benefits of CAP cannot always be expressed in quantitative terms - there are so many students whose outlook has been widened as a result of educational, social and cultural experiences through their school's Country Areas Programs initiatives.

Outcomes from CAP are probably impossible to measure in a traditional way, but in terms of quality, and educational enhancement, provide us with an undeniable justification of the value, and therefore the continuation, of the Country Areas Program.

See **Appendix 1 for CAP Case Studies.**

10 CHOICE OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

It is not possible for all schools to provide the most appropriate education for ALL students.

Some schools by virtue of their size and geographic location are not able to offer a comprehensive curriculum or the opportunities for personal interaction with other students on a face to face basis – a necessity for some subjects and for some students.

Not all students can work successfully and fulfil their potential when isolated from their peers and teachers. The healthy competition which a face to face class involves is necessary for some students to stimulate them. Others need the benefit of classroom interaction, which take place on a daily basis to learn and succeed in their studies.

It is essential that ALL students are given the best opportunity to achieve their potential in their studies.

ICPA (Aust) has stated on numerous occasions that it is not necessarily the case that the best place for children to be educated, is as close as possible to their homes. Small communities can be extremely insular, leading to a narrow view of the world which often causes students to lack motivation and not perform to their optimum potential.

We encourage our children to strive for their best NOT to settle for the minimum or lowest requirement.

Education is the key to a future for our children – isolated rural and remote children are not operating from a 'level playing field.' They do not have the same choices that are available to students who live in urban areas, who can access the school of their choice.

ICPA (Aust) supports all forms of educational opportunities to be available, but there should be the freedom of choice pertaining to the students needs and parents expectations for educational opportunities.

There are difficulties in some states with the State/Territory Educational Authority, as they classify this as bypassing a central or small high school if a student does not meet the AIC eligibility criteria and lives in these small isolated rural and remote towns. The relevant State/Territory Education Authority need to confer with the Federal Minister for Education, Training and Youth Affairs to look at the situation faced by students in

isolated rural and remote areas realistically.

Education in a modern society should be improving educational outcomes and should not be restricted by unnecessary bureaucratic regulations. It should be aimed at encouraging students to widen their knowledge in the areas of tolerance, drama, art, music, team sports and community activities not often possible in small rural and remote schools.

Isolated rural and remote parents are desperate in trying to give their children the best opportunity they can to further their education and have a future financial earning capacity in their adulthood.

The 1997 (latest) Report of Schooling shows the completion rates for Year 12 as 52% for remote students and 66% for urban students with a national total of 65%. Students who live in remote areas have access to the AIC, some rural students do not.

Retention rates to Year 12 in South West Queensland are 28%, compared to 81% in Brisbane (Source: ABS, Schools Australia, Catalogue, No. 4221.0). It is time for Governments to ask **WHY** and to adopt a bipartisan approach to developing meaningful and sustainable solutions.

➡ • ***ICPA (Aust) maintains that where a student receives 50% of their lessons by a mode other than face to face teaching, the student should be eligible for the payment of AIC or the Away from Home component of the Youth Allowance if they must board away from home to attend a large secondary school.***

ICPA (Aust) maintains that the State/Territory Education Authority should have the discretion to state that for any particular student, the nearest school does not offer appropriate education for the student when some of the following circumstances apply;

- The decision has the support of the students' current principal
- The school cannot offer courses or subjects at levels, which the student needs to follow a particular career path.
- The school cannot offer a least 50% of a students Year 12 subjects by conventional face to face teaching.
- The student lacks peers support or encouragement in aiming for further study at University
- A student displaying musical, artistic, sporting or dramatic talent has no access to teachers or coaching to develop this talent locally.

ICPA (Aust) supports students who wish to stay close to home in smaller centres for their education, but the needs of these students should not be more important than those students who need to access a more appropriate school to meet their educational goals

Each case should be assessed on its merits.

No isolated rural or remote student should be prevented from achieving their potential just because some students in their community have no desire to move to a larger less isolated school.

Unless the student has had a reasonable choice of subjects at secondary level and at a required level their access to tertiary study may be limited.

Merely completing Year 12 does not enable a student to follow a career path in engineering, science, medicine physiotherapy, journalism, nursing, law, accountancy, economics or many of the other professional pathways chosen by young people.

The future of rural and remote Australia is dependent on well-educated young people. Access to an appropriate education, which equips them for life is something that every child in Australia is entitled to.

See Appendix 2 for Case Studies

11 EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

The demand for early childhood services continues to grow right throughout rural and remote areas of Australia. It is critical that policy makers fully understand the growing social isolation that many young families in rural and remote areas are facing as a result of population decline. Access to a range of early childhood programs is crucial to the emotional well-being of these families, providing vital support for parents working 'off and on farm', as well as those living in small remote communities.

- ➡ • ***ICPA (Aust) advocates that an appropriate range of early childhood programs be available to support children and families who live in rural and remote areas, and***
- ➡ • ***that funds be distributed on the basis of need to ensure the ongoing development of early childhood programs that support families who live in rural and remote areas.*** For example:
 - a) the RICE (Remote and Isolated Children's Exercise) program in South Australia
 - b) National Residential Training Program (Mobile Muster) NSW
 - c) The 'Parents as Teachers' program in the Northern Territory
 - d) The Oatlands Childcare Centre 'Mobile Service' in Tasmania
 - e) The 'Remote Area Family Service' and the 'Remote Family Care Service' sponsored by Frontier Services, in Queensland
 - f) The Rural Children's Program in Queensland which has emphasised the need for communities to identify the type of service they need, and has attempted to be flexible and innovative in meeting some of the children's services needs in rural and remote areas.
- ➡ • ***that there be an ongoing commitment to maintaining funding for mobile units providing Early Childhood programs.***
- ➡ • ***that there be a commitment to establishing support networks and ongoing professional development for early childhood teachers and child carers in rural and remote communities.***

Early Childhood mobile units can in many instances act as an early intervention

mediation with a child/children with learning difficulties. They can provide information on where assistance can be obtained and the personnel to contact. In some instances it is the mobile service personnel who have detected a particular problem with a child that the parent has not perceived. Without these mobiles early intervention of special needs for many isolated rural and remote families would never have eventuated.

PREPARATION OF TEACHERS FOR RURAL AND REMOTE EDUCATION

12 STAFFING – Rural and Remote Schools including Distance Education Schools

To ensure the continuity of delivery of quality educational services to students in rural and remote schools, Distance Education schools and pre schools ICPA (Aust) believe

- ➔ • *That a rural education component should be included in pre service teacher training courses to prepare teachers for the diversity of teaching situations in rural and remote schools.*
- ➔ • *That a rural component be written into all educational policy and programs to ensure the practicality of their implementation in rural and remote areas*
- ➔ • *That the 'rural education' component be supported by pre service practical experiences conducted in a diversity of teaching situations in rural and remote areas such as is happening in Queensland and New South Wales: For example*

a) Queensland University Technology and ICPA – QLD Inc have developed a program for student teacher practicum placements across rural and remote Queensland. This program enables student teachers to gain first hand experience teaching in small schools, along with an opportunity to develop an understanding of what remote schools and communities are really like. One of the significant outcomes of this program has been that many of the students, (the majority who are from the city) have applied for and accepted appointment in rural and remote communities.

The travel costs for participating students is funded by Priority Country Area Program

b) The University of Southern Queensland includes a mandatory course component 'Teaching in Small Rural Communities', along with the requirement for all Bachelor of Education students to complete their final practicum in a small rural school and the option to complete additional experiences such as the Isolated Children's Project and the Isolated Schools' Project.

c) The University of Central Queensland and James Cook University both have a rural practicum component to their Education pre service courses.

d) The Remote Aboriginal Teacher Education Program (RATEP) has proved to be a successful model for the training of teachers for remote communities.

e) Charles Sturt University NSW has also developed a program by which student teachers have developed programs enabling students to have practicum placements in rural and isolated small schools.

- ➔ • *A commitment to investigating how new technologies may assist in providing prospective teachers with information about teaching in rural and remote areas and how technologies may be used to support teachers working in rural and remote environments.*

- ➔ • *That extra resources be made available to provide access to a wide range of educational opportunities for students in rural and remote schools and Distance Education schools and the following inequities imposed by geographic isolation be taken into consideration;*
 - *Personal and professional isolation of teachers*
 - *The reduced secondary curriculum options which can be offered*
 - *The levels of staff experience*
 - *The additional postage and telephone costs*
 - *The difficulties of access and costs of technology*
 - *The additional time staff and students have to be away from schools in order to participate in a range of activities, together with the associated costs*

- ➔ • *That teachers in rural and remote schools have support mechanisms to assist with social problems with students within the school community that would be better handled by an outside source.* Eg single father in a small country town with a daughter in Year One attending primary school. The daughter is taken from the father because of problems totally unrelated to school and officials interview the child's teacher who is a first year graduate. The father victimises the teacher and blames her for the loss of his daughter.

- Attracting and retaining qualified teachers to many isolated rural and remote areas is an increasing problem once their own children reach secondary level.

- Many young teachers who are sent to isolated rural and remote areas have difficulty in dealing with the social and professional isolation. Often it is their first time away from home.

13 TEACHER INCENTIVES

ICPA (Aust) supports plans to attract and retain teachers in rural and remote schools. Incentives, established in some states, such as Qld and NSW, by regional universities to

give student teachers the opportunity of working in a rural or remote school during a practicum, are supported by ICPA. This gives the student teacher the opportunity of learning about the varied and different aspects of rural and remote positions while still under the protection of the university environment.

This can allay fears in advance, of accepting or applying for a rural or remote position on graduation.

- ➔ • ***It is essential that all states/territory provide these opportunities and experience to student teachers if young and enthusiastic teachers are to be attracted to work in isolated schools.***

An innovative program provided by the State Advisory Council of the Country Areas Program in NSW piloted in 1998 enabled competent and committed students in the Graduate Diploma of Education (Secondary) program to nominate in an internship program. This provides an extended period of time in schools for the intern before entering full time employment and gives support for the intern from an experienced teacher as a mentor. This funding enables student to be placed in more isolated rural settings and meets the financial costs both of the student and mentor.

Some states have also provided incentives for teachers to come to rural and remote areas to teach. Students in these areas need access to enthusiastic teachers who are 'life long learners.' It is essential that all state/territory education authorities maintain a commitment to rural and remote areas in ensuring that quality teachers are attracted to these areas for a period of country service.

The education of rural and remote children should not be inferior to that available in larger regional areas. Quality teachers must have confidence that service in a rural and remote area will not be disadvantageous when applying for future promotional positions in regional or urban schools.

Often the experience gained in an isolated area produces a more adaptable, confident teacher who has had to deal with situations without the benefit of peer or other forms of professional support. Recognition of these particular skills obtained in isolated areas should be seen as an advantage.

The abolition of the transfer situation and introduction of merit selection that has occurred in some States has created a situation whereby rural and remote children are being disadvantaged and their education sacrificed as teachers can no longer feel confident about promotional positions and being able to return to metropolitan teaching positions after serving time in rural and remote areas, sometimes in extreme isolation. Often teachers in rural and remote areas are faced with the following;

- Disillusioned students in many cases who are doing subjects which do not interest/stimulate them, lack optimism in many rural and remote areas.
- Drug and alcohol problems with very limited access to counselling or medical assistance when needed.
- Cultural problems are evident in some schools and victimisation of students does exist.

- Discipline problems are experienced in many classes and parents fear at times for the safety of their children, let alone the effect on their education through lessons being continually disrupted.
- Many teachers are experiencing 'curriculum overload' especially those in one and two teacher schools. This can be very discouraging for young teachers isolated from both peer and professional support.
- The lack of relief staff in rural and remote areas means it is very difficult for these teachers to attend training and development days and forces teachers to continue working when ill.
- A teacher attempting to further their qualifications is often required to study via Distance Education and this in an isolated area can be a great disadvantage with such barriers as weekly mail delivery for accessing materials and returning assignments.
- The provision of well maintained accommodation is an essential component, conducive to attracting and retaining teachers in isolated rural and remote areas.

Teachers need support and encouragement to stay and work in rural and remote areas. (not just monetary incentives)

COMMUNICATIONS

The quality of communications has a vital influence on the lives of isolated people and access to telecommunications networks can help to alleviate isolation.

14 TELECOMMUNICATIONS

- ➔ • *Rural and remote residents and consumers are insistent that the Universal Service Obligation (Telephone) is legislated, upgraded, clearly defined, tightened up and expanded on an ongoing basis to reflect changing technology and community expectations regardless of who the carrier may be.*
- ➔ • *Also that the Standard Telephone Service is redefined to not only include voice but also includes facsimile and comparable data capacity as our urban counterparts expect and receive.*
- ➔ • *It is essential that quality communication infrastructure is urgently implemented for rural and remote residents to ensure communication services are available at an affordable cost and comparable speeds as urban residents receive. The Internet Cafes are only an 'add on' at present*

to these residents without the basic communication infrastructure being installed.

- ➔ • *The Universal (customer) Service Guarantee infrastructure needs to be continued to protect rural and remote consumers, regardless of the carrier or future carriers, so as to ensure service and maintenance of fault rectification time lines and installations of the telephone networks is kept to a minimum in these areas. These services are essential for education, health, social and business reasons as equity, justice and necessity.*
- ➔ • *ICPA (Aust) feels untimed local calls to rural and remote areas should be on the same basis as other Australians. The introduced Rebate Scheme does not address legislative rights of the majority of people who live and work in rural and remote Australia and the use of "13" numbers currently negates this rebate.*

Isolated rural and remote families still have timed calls to their Service Town, their School of Distance Education, their children boarding at the local boarding facilities, their local doctor, their local Banks, their local Internet provider, virtually every service and social contact that is accessible UNTIMED to our urban counterparts.

Senior secondary Distance Education students cannot access the internet in many cases. Students who do have access to the Internet find the costs prohibitive, as there are very few providers with local call access.

Many telephone lines are not capable of carrying the data required to make Internet access for students a reality. It is too slow, drops out and too expensive.

ICPA (Aust) seeks:

- ➔ • *an integrated quality distance education service centred on personal interaction from K – 12 offering a complete network of programs, facilities and support services to be provided through a system of coordinated educational services delivered to geographically isolated students homes and schools in rural and remote areas.*
- ➔ • *that priority be given to establish clear reliable two way voice and data communications from all School Of the Air (SOTA) or Distance Education Centres, (ie teacher/student, supervisor/teacher, student/teacher, student/student),*
 - a) 'on air' services be available to students K – 12
 - b) two way data be available to students K – 12
 - c) supply of computer systems equipped with modems to students K-12

Technology must only ever be used as an enhancement tool for education and not used to replace face to face teaching

It is important there be the provision for forward planning to ensure the use of new technology is to enhance, not replace the personal contact between teacher/student, teacher/supervisor/ and student/student.

- Technology must be used to enhance educational opportunities but never to further isolate students from their peers. This could particularly adversely affect rural and remote students.
- It is vital that schools in rural and remote areas have quality, reliable and equitable access to the latest technology available.
- Providing ready access to the new technology could solve problems of limited library/written resources in rural and remote schools.
- That a study be conducted on the educational outcomes, social interaction and maturity for isolated rural and remote students studying many subjects via technology.
- On going professional development and technical support for teachers expected to implement current technological change in rural and remote areas must be budgeted for.
- All students will need the skills to allow them to adapt to the rapid and less predictable changes that will confront them in the future

15 POSTAL

It is essential to ensure that with any privatisation the Universal Service Guarantee (Postal Service) continues to deliver Distance Education (DE) material as a letter delivery service regardless of a person's place of residence. At present the DE papers, although classified as parcel delivery are sent at letter delivery rate. This is most relevant to families receiving these postings via the Remote Air Service Subsidy Scheme. If this was to change the cost would become prohibitive to those concerned.

15a The Remote Air Services Subsidy Scheme (RASSS)

The Remote Air Services Subsidy (RASS) Scheme which is currently under review provides subsidies to four air service companies servicing remote communities which currently have no suitable alternate mode of transport for the delivery of mail and educational supplies. Services operate out of Cairns and Mt Isa - Queensland, Katherine and Alice Springs – Northern Territory, Port Augusta – South Australia and Kununurra – Western Australia.

People who have the skills and commitment to live in the remotest parts of Australia should be able to reasonably expect that the export income and national wealth which they generate and pay taxes on in good years, would entitle them to two basic services like mail and access to schooling.

ICPA (AUST) requests;

- ➔ • ***That the RASS Scheme be consolidated, funded and restructured where necessary, so that isolated remote clients, operators and providers can face***

the future with services which are fundamental, modest, adequate and necessary as equity and justice.

- ➔ • *That the Federal Government guarantee the Remote Area Service Subsidy Scheme (RASSS) will be retained in its present form of providing a free regular mail service and a passenger and freight service to isolated remote families and communities where there is no reliable alternative.*
- ➔ • *That the Federal Government ensures that Australia Post deliver parcels to properties serviced by the RASSS with no extra charge above that of delivery to the nearest Post Office.*
- ➔ • *It is important that airstrips acceptable for charter be acceptable for passengers also. Rural and remote regions do not have the finances to upgrade airstrips to the Civil Aviation Safety Authorities (CASA) standards for passengers travel.* For example - You can charter a plane and that is acceptable, but you can not get on that same plane as a passenger, because the airstrips are not up to a certain required standard. You can be a passenger on the charter plane, a passenger on the mail plane so ‘WHERE is the DIFFERENCE?’

WHETHER THE EDUCATION AVAILABLE TO CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES, INDIGENOUS CHILDREN AND CHILDREN FROM DIVERSE CULTURAL, RELIGIOUS AND LINGUISTIC BACKGROUNDS COMPLIES WITH THEIR HUMAN RIGHTS

16 Learning Difficulties

All areas of the curriculum rely very heavily on print based materials – it is the only medium that all students can access, irrespective of where they live. The teacher at the School of The Air or Distance Education Centre must at all times be conscious of the problems faced by students with learning difficulties, as work can come back completed but unless that teacher knows the student they would assume that it is done in the normal time. A child with a learning difficulty can take just as much pride in their work but the time taken to achieve the desired result may be far from normal. Many of the students work through their holidays to keep up. The stress this places on the child, supervisor and other siblings can lead to an unwillingness to learn and behavioural problems, unless the teacher is receptive to the supervisors and students silent cries for help. The teacher cannot see or observe the child working and must rely on the written and sometimes oral work to understand and know the child's level of ability and comprehension of the work.

It is much more difficult for a student with learning difficulties to be assessed when studying via Distance Education. It is also very difficult for the supervisor (usually untrained) to know how to assist their child without the assistance of a teacher trained in assessing and working with learning difficulties.

Students from rural and remote areas who have been identified as requiring speech

therapists, occupational therapists and physiotherapists etc do not have access to these services on a regular basis, *if at all*.

Small primary rural and remote schools cannot always get the services of these and other professionals such as school counsellors to conduct diagnostic tests on a regular basis, as there is a shortage of such personnel in rural and remote areas. They have enough work in the larger centres to only allocate a very small amount of time to outlying rural and remote schools. Much of which the time is spent travelling to and from these places.

There are concerns for families on the anomalies for the eligibility to receive financial assistance for such health services such as the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme (IPTAAS) Allowance as it is known in New South Wales and South Australia and the PATS in Western Australia and the Northern Territory.

ICPA (Aust) requests

- ➔ • *That travel by IPTAAS and PATS should be recognised between states when families live near state borders and the medical treatment provided can be resourced more readily and conveniently interstate. Many patients eligible for the IPTAAS and PATS are far from home and family. Family or support from friends may be available at an interstate city rather than intrastate. This is a real issue between New South Wales and South Australia.*
- ➔ • *Funds available for travel and accommodation should be negotiable between different modes of transport. Consideration should be given to the locality, age and circumstances of the family when decisions are made as to the mode of transport used.*
- ➔ • *The provision of mobile early intervention assessment and therapist teams to visit on a regular basis to central locations, accessible to families in rural and remote areas. There have been cases where a child has had to travel up to 500km for one therapist in one centre and another 200km in another direction for another therapist.*
- ➔ • *The identification and early intervention strategies becoming a reality for all children with specific needs irrespective of where they live.*
- ➔ • *That students with special need, studying via Distance Education or in small rural and remote schools have regular access to special education support teachers and therapists.*

It is pleasing to note that the Federal Government had in its recent budget, allocated funding for literacy and numeracy programs in schools. It is hoped that some of this funding will be available to assist in the determination of those with learning difficulties and those who are gifted and talented. All too often in our isolated small rural and remote schools there is not the expertise to either diagnose a child with difficulties / disabilities or gifted and talented students and this is more apparent in our schools of

Distance Education where marking teachers are so removed from their students. More often than not there is a lack of trained professionals in this area.

The struggle for suitable education/ development for isolated rural and remote children with a disability depends on cooperation of different departments and access to regular and on going services and programs.

In the 'International Convention the Rights of A Child' as a signatory in Article 23 it states the following;

Recognising the special needs of a disabled child, assistance extended in accordance with paragraph 2 shall be provided free of charge, whenever possible, taking into account the financial resource of the parents or others caring for the child, and shall be designed to ensure that the disabled child has effective access to and receives education, training, health care services, rehabilitation services, preparation for employment and recreation opportunities in a manner conducive to the child's achieving the fullest possible social interaction and individual development including his or her cultural and spiritual development.

17 HEALTH ISSUES

There is irrefutable evidence of the inferior status of health in rural and remote areas and of inferior access to options in health services.

It is hoped that when the barriers are overcome, there will be substantial and immediate improvements in rural and remote health status. All too often the barriers are the frequent failure of the Government and Associations to collaborate adequately with consumers. The difficulties in collaborating closely with each other means that many health services are delivered in a context which are being overly prescriptive or implemented in a 'one size fits all' approach to health services in rural and remote areas.

With the launch of the document "Healthy Horizons" the Ministers have agreed that this document represents a unique and essential undertaking by State, Territory and Commonwealth Governments to ensure efforts are coordinated and clearly focussed on the priority health issues faced by rural and remote Australians.

The health needs of people in rural, regional and remote Australia is varied and diverse and there is a need to be flexible in the way in which health services are delivered and the 'Healthy Horizons' framework provided the context for this to occur and ICPA (Aust) supports this.

Health providers are also very stressed as they are not given the support required. They work long exhausting hours with little or no reward. Effective health programs need to support the provider as well as the consumer.

Often the links between health which affects one's lifestyle and education abilities is not apparent or well understood.

SUMMARY

In conclusion, for education and services to be available and accessible for isolated rural and remote families there needs to be the following;

- ➔ • *A genuine commitment to rural and remote education and rural and remote communities.*
- ➔ • *A partnership between the education system and communities to ensure the educational needs of ALL children are met, including those at risk*
- ➔ • *Education in rural and remote schools and Distance Education schools need to be valued and not seen as second rate.*
- ➔ • *Education in rural and remote areas need to be appropriately resourced and funds allocated to meet the students needs despite geographic isolation.*
- ➔ • *Education must be accessible for all children irrespective of where they live and should be appropriate and affordable.*
- ➔ • *Every student should have the right to an education that equips them for participation in the workplace or prepares them for further tertiary study as required.*
- ➔ • *It is essential that quality communication infrastructure is urgently implemented for rural and remote residents to ensure communication services are available at an affordable cost and comparable speed to those received by urban residents.*
- ➔ • *The provision of an allowance for the Home Tutor, (GIPSSACC) usually the mother who supervises, their children's daily schooling through Distance Education.*
- ➔ • *That a Rural Communities Policy be put in place.*
'A rural development policy worthy of the name will include a compelling vision of what an excellent rural education should encompass. It will also address the issue of how best to make education a central part of an overall rural agenda'. (Sher and Sher 1994).

ICPA (Aust) believes that the prospects for rural development, and thus, the prospects for a better future for Australia's rural and remote places, are dependent upon access to a broad range of appropriate educational options and activities.

However, it is patently obvious that while a highly educated rural and remote population can facilitate sustainable rural development, such a scenario begs the question as to

whether this can happen without interventionist economic policies by the Commonwealth and State Governments. Without such policies, the current scenario whereby a significant proportion of rural and remote youth that receive higher education never return to their regions because of limited professional job opportunities and substandard physical and social infrastructure, will continue to flourish.

Isolated rural and remote students are not playing on a 'level playing field' they are continually playing uphill with the sun in their eyes.

ICPA (Aust) commends this submission to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission to their National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education.

The Federal Council of the Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia Inc looks forward to receiving the results and recommendations from this inquiry and would be pleased to provide any additional information if required.

APPENDIX 1

Country Areas Program CAP

Examples of how Country Area Program initiatives have enhanced the educational experiences of rural and remote Australian children.

- A** Children in primary school from small isolated Western Australian centres could not participate in team sports - there were simply not enough children to make up a team. When these children moved on to secondary education, they considered themselves to be unable to take part in what is deemed to be an essential part of high school life - competitive sporting activities. There were so many other children who had the skills required. With the provision of CAP funding, specialist sports teachers taught isolated primary school children the skills needed in order to participate in a vast array of sports.
- B** Young children in isolated areas are often deprived of experiences that are easily encountered in an urban school - excursions to a theatre, a museum, a fire station, the Botanical Gardens, a Bowling Alley, a large library where visiting 'writers and poets' speak to groups of children. A CAP school in Queensland sought to overcome this by providing an 'artist-in-residence' - a poet - for 2 days in a remote area. Whilst at the small school, children were taught how to write a poem. When a few days later a child from the school suffered the loss of his pet, he wrote a poem to express his grief. The opportunity to choose poetry as his medium was a direct outcome of the visit to the school by an Australian poet.
- C** Western Australian children who study through the Schools of Isolated and Distance Education (SIDE) need opportunities to meet together to have a chance to mix with their fellow students. This is something that is taken for granted in urban schools. 'Mini' schools and camps are essential elements for these children's education and these are funded by the Country Areas Program.
- D** Two sisters who attended a small school in New South Wales have benefited enormously from CAP music programs that took place in their school. A music teacher was employed to overcome the obvious disadvantage that many isolated children experience - that is, the lack of opportunity to participate in cultural activities. As these two sisters undertook lessons in the study of the violin and the drums it became obvious that they had great musical ability. Progression on to secondary school meant that they could participate in musical performances on a much larger scale. To date, one of the sisters is the percussionist for the school orchestra and the Tamworth Regional Youth Orchestra was selected by members of the Sydney Symphony orchestra to be the percussionist at two workshops and has been awarded prizes for commitment and dedication to music. The other sister began by playing the violin in individual performances, and then as a member of both string ensembles and the school orchestra. She performed in the Australian Orchestra Festival in Sydney when in Year 8. In later years she entered the Conservatoriums Regional Youth Orchestra, as well as leading the Youth String Orchestra and String Quartet in the same establishment. In Year 12, this student became a music prefect at her school and was awarded the Sir Adrian Solomon Conservatorium Award for Violin Achievement. Now undertaking tertiary education, she plays the violin in the Emmanuel College Orchestra at the University of Queensland.
- Both sisters are convinced that their successes in the field of music can be directly attributed to the CAP music program that began at their primary school.

Examples such as the ones mentioned above exist all around Australia. Examples that

provide outcomes that are probably impossible to measure in a traditional way, but in terms of quality, and educational enhancement, provide us with an undeniable justification of the value, and therefore the continuation, of the Country Areas Program.

APPENDIX 2

APPROPRIATE SCHOOLING

The following examples are based on actual case studies and a sample of the letters which have been presented to the Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia Inc. by members concerned with the access to an appropriate education for their children.

Case Study 1

The parents of a young student in Year 9 at a small central school (NSW) have been recommended by the school principal to send their daughter on to a larger high school as she is an extremely bright student who is displaying great potential. The principal is concerned that the student will not be able to achieve in the school due to several factors - peer pressure from the other students, who are not interested in further education and just waiting to leave school, the limited range of subjects that can be offered and supported within the school on a face to face basis. These subjects can only be offered at the basic level as this is what the majority of the students require. The student is also gifted musically and as there are no facilities for teaching music within the town and no professional instruction available locally - it involves a 200km round trip for a lesson, this is not a practical or financially viable option.

This student has been refused AIC as there is a central school less than 56km from her home. The mother has sent her daughter away to board at a larger high school in a regional city but cannot receive the AIC. She acknowledges that her other children are not as talented and should not be eligible for assistance if they choose to attend another school as the subject level they need is provided locally. The gifted daughter should be eligible to receive AIC to access a school and education which is appropriate to her needs.

Case Study 2

Another student shows exceptional talent in drama and has taken leading roles in school productions over four years. Her goal is to become a Drama teacher but drama is not offered at the school or by Distance Education at the school.

The student's English teacher has recommended that she attend a larger regional high school as she would be disadvantaged in the field of drama at the central school. The student is also involved in competing in swimming at the State level. Attendance at the State high school would give her the opportunity of swimming at a National level.

This student could not access either Federal or State allowances to board away from home to attend a larger regional government high school where she has access to the courses and tuition she requires for her future career direction.

Case Study 3

"As we have a Central School in our area in the North West of New South Wales, we are not eligible under the present criteria to access the AIC allowance. This puts an enormous financial burden on our family if we want our daughters to achieve their full potential and go on to tertiary studies. With a very small percent sitting for the HSC and an even smaller percent doing Tertiary studies the environment is not conducive to children furthering their studies.

A case in point - three girls went through the same primary classes at this school .

Child A was Dux of the primary school.

Child B was above average

Child C was an average student.

Child A travelled each day to attend a small high school nearby. Her TER was just over 50 - no further studies.

Child B went to a Country boarding school - TER of 68 - now at Uni.

Child C went to a Sydney boarding school - TER of 81 - now at Uni.

Another point is that just like health care there are different levels of care for different areas. e.g. an isolated rural town has basic general medical care, a regional city has more care, maternity services and specialists but you have to go to SYDNEY for brain surgery or heart surgery. So it is with EDUCATION.

A central school or small rural high school gives basic education which is fine for 90% of the students, 10% of the students require more from their schooling. These children want to go on to tertiary studies with a good enough TER to get them there.

It has been shown that there is a very low percentage of children from isolated schools accessing tertiary education and the isolated child needs further education and training to improve their employment prospects. Their opportunities are limited by their isolation and we are just trying to even up the equation so that they have the same education that is available to the vast majority of Australian school children but not to us in our remote area.

I would like my children to go to the same school as their brothers which provides them with a Catholic education which I consider very important. They should be able to access a school of their religion as this is a basic human right but if we are denied the allowance they are also denying us the right of that education.

We are also denied the right to choose a school that we feel gives our children the chance to fulfil their potential in education. They should be offered a wider range of subjects which are all delivered face to face. Our children would perform better with interaction from the other students involved in that subject being offered in this school. If my children had to access some subjects by correspondence it would further isolate them, having to work even more on their own.

I find that my children are becoming more accepting of bad language and bad behaviour that is not acceptable. Surely as parents we have a right to choose an environment that is safe and of a certain standard.

We are isolated by way of medical services, distance, cultural activities. But it is in the Government's power to give us access to an appropriate education for our children so they shouldn't isolate us further.

Some children have been allowed to bypass their school on the grounds of being bullied to the point of police action. Do we have to have our children bullied so that we can access the AIC allowance or are we being discriminated against because our children are not being bullied?

We just want the same rights for our children as the other citizens in Australia. The best thing we can give our children is a good education and because we do not have the choice of schools we are denied this basic right."

Case Study 4

Learning Difficulties

The family live in Central Queensland and have two sons with learning difficulties and two daughters with no problems.

They have an 18 year old who has not been able to achieve what he wanted to do in life simply because of the lack of remedial assistance he received while he was at school in this isolated area. He is a very poor speller and reader who has not been able to succeed when sitting for aptitude tests that were necessary for him to pass when he applied for apprenticeships as a diesel fitter. He is now restricted to working on local cotton farms when he would love to go away for further training

The other son was born in 1984 and whilst in Year 2 it was recognised he had difficulty with reading and some support was provided through the Learning Support Teacher at the local school which goes to Year 10. At the age of 12 years 8 months it was discovered the child had a reading age comparable to an average Year Five (10 year old).

In 1993 the parents were advised their son had ADD (Attention Deficient Order) and he was prescribed RITALIN as the drug was believed to assist with learning. The drug was trialed for a year and it was felt that there was no marked improvement so it was discontinued.

At the school there has never been a full time specially trained or fully qualified remedial teacher. There were also no private providers of remedial assistance available.

Despite receiving some form of remedial assistance up to Year 7 the student was not coping well academically in Year 8. In 1997 the school indicated via a letter that the student was to be exempt from LOTE because of his learning difficulties which required the assistance of support teachers. Instead of LOTE he was to receive assistance to develop his literacy skills. Unfortunately during these LOTE times the student was instead sent to the school's groundsman/ janitor. At other times during English classes instead of receiving remedial assistance the student was sent to help the Year 3/4 class with mathematics.

The student did not receive any remedial assistance from the Learning Support Teacher (who was not a qualified remedial teacher) in Year 8 which caused problems in all other subjects.

The parents made the decision to send him to a boarding school where they were assured he would receive assistance from a specialist remedial teacher. During 1998 the student received considerable assistance at the boarding school and his comment to his mother was "Mum I hope I do really well at this school so I can come back and tell the teachers at my other school I am not as dumb as they think I am."

The parents are not sure how they will manage financially and the son used money he earned himself by cotton chipping over the holidays to pay for his first terms fees.

The parents have been applying for AIC but as yet are being denied as the student's home does not satisfy the distance criteria for geographic isolation under the AIC Scheme. In addition the student does not meet the requirement for eligibility as a remedial student according to the Department and yet

- a) he requires literacy tutoring and was not getting it at the isolated school he attended in Central Queensland and
- b) the Principal advised that an educational institution guaranteeing the support required would better suit his needs.

Case Study 5

Gifted and Talented

The family live in a town in Western Queensland and their student a daughter, attended a 'high top' school which goes to Year 10 only.

At the completion of Year 9 in 1998, the student sat for maths entrance exam to ascertain if she was capable of coping with Advanced mathematics in Year 10. Excellent results were obtained and the student is now in the top class of the Advanced Maths in Year 10.

As the student is gifted and talented she has been at a boarding school since 1997 in Brisbane studying Maths, English, Music, Geography, Science, Information Technology and Health and Physical Education.

Advanced Maths, Music and Geography are not offered at the local school and the student wishes to pursue Maths, Economics and Accountancy in Years 11 and 12. She is also extremely talented in various sporting activities, all of which are unavailable at the local school.

The parents have a letter from the Principal Education Officer from their District Office confirming that the local State school did not offer the complete package of subjects the student wished to pursue in 1999 and appropriate to her level of educational goals.

At this stage the parents are being denied the AIC Allowance as they do not fit the AIC geographic isolation criteria.

There does not seem to be any acknowledgment of students who are gifted and talented in the AIC guidelines and the reluctance to accept that factor from their respective school means that many of these students get denied the chance to achieve their optimal educational aspirations. As a result these families cannot receive any financial assistance due to the eligibility criteria to provide a choice of educational opportunities for their students.

APPENDIX 3

FINANCIAL COSTS OF EDUCATING CHILDREN

Case Study 1

Educating via Distance Education.

A family in South West NSW has been educating their children by Distance Education. There are 5 children in the family and the mother is having difficulty supervising her children on Distance Education. There are two pre-school children in the family, and she is concerned that the oldest student is slipping behind in her work and will not be up to standard for high school. The mother also feels that she would cope better with the other four children if the eldest were away at school.

In making the decision to send their daughter to a school term hostel, to access a government school and education on a 'face to face' basis, the family was faced with the fees which are over \$6,000 per year per student. Despite the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) allowance the family still has to meet a gap of \$1900 fees per year for each child at the hostel. This child is not eligible for the State Living Away From Home Allowance as she is only of primary age. The family could not meet the additional fees required.

The family have been in drought for the past 9 years and their sheep numbers have been reduced to 500 from over 5,000. Properties cannot be sold and wool prices are extremely depressed. Although they have been in drought since 1990 this family has only received exceptional circumstances assistance since 1998.

Case Study 2

Educating Students through Secondary and Tertiary Studies

Eyre Peninsular - SOUTH AUSTRALIA

The family have three children and had access to a R-10 Area school.

The eldest son commenced boarding school in Year 10 in the early 90's as did the only daughter. Their second son commenced boarding in Year 10 in 1998. They had no access to Austudy in the three years that each of their children went to college and received AIC in the last two years only.

In 1995 (1993-94 financial year) the family applied for Austudy but were ineligible. However they were eligible for the Supplementary Loan of \$2000, which they made use of because of severe drought in 1994. In 1996 (1994-95 financial year) they were eligible for Austudy (because of the '94 drought) but were then deemed ineligible by the application of the new Actual Means Test. This AMT also made them ineligible for ANY Supplementary Loan, yet it was in a year of one of their lowest incomes for a very long time.

The eldest boys tertiary course necessitated around 30 contact hours per week and so he was unable to do a lot of part time work. He worked through all holidays as well as supermarket 'night fill' sometimes working up to 16 hours a day. Eventually this caused his health to suffer in 1997 and he ended up in hospital. As a result in 1998 this son took out a Tertiary Student Loan through the bank for \$5000 of which the parents went guarantor. Repayments have to begin four months prior post graduation and paid in full within three years.

The daughter deferred her course in the middle of 1998 to go onto Job Search as she was unable to earn enough money to continue studying. She does do some part time artwork and so her income varies and sometimes can be as low as \$40. Then came the introduction of the Youth Allowance so she was unable to continue to receive Job Search after only receiving two payments. She has returned to the University and is in the final year of her course but with a heavy load her earning ability is somewhat curbed.

The youngest son is in Year 11 at college and is eligible for the AIC.

Educating their children has been somewhat of a nightmare. They have questioned what they have done and wonder if they would have been better sending their children straight out into the workforce. It certainly would have been a lot less stressful.

The eldest son will complete his education with a debt of \$8500 along with his HEC's debt and by the end of 1999 the family will have funded their children living away from home for what will be equivalent to 16 years and while they are not giant leaps they are taking several backward steps financially every year.

APPENDIX 4

GIVE CHILDREN IN RURAL AND REMOTE AREAS A FAIR GO

The following is a very passionate account from a farming family on the Eyre Peninsula of SA.

All that rural families want for their children is a good education - a basic expectation and one easily realised by urban families, but not, I fear, by us.

Our local school is well equipped for primary and lower secondary, but is not able to meet student needs in higher grades. Year 10 often has as few as two students. Ours is an R-10 school, but recently Years 11 & 12 have been offered even though there are only 1 and 3 students respectively in these grades. All or most subjects are delivered through the Open Access College. The school staff are not equipped to help students in these subjects and more often than not are just one step ahead. There is no regard paid to the quality of the course offered, just as long as it is being offered.

The powers that be tell us that an education received in our small rural school is as good as one received in the city. Even the teachers at our school do not believe that because not one will leave their children there to complete their secondary education. In fact some send them away as early as Year 8. Principals always make sure they are transferred from here prior to their children commencing secondary education, but will push the possibility of senior secondary classes by encouraging all students to remain. Surely we should not be expected to leave our children here and jeopardise their future, in order to maintain numbers and jobs in our local school. Aren't our children's future as important as any one else's? If our children want to grow, both academically and socially, they need to go to a school that provides them with a peer group with which they can interact and compete.

I believe the absolute proof that a city education is superior, is with the General Practitioners' issue. Some years ago, country educated students were not permitted into medical schools because their education was considered inferior. Today they seek to solve the problem by allowing country educated students into medical school with a "special" lower entrance score. Why??? Either they have to do this because the education country students receive is not adequate or they are of less intelligence than city students! I certainly do not believe that this is the case. I guess that this is great if you want to be a doctor, but some want to be agronomists, or vets or even winemakers.

Tertiary study is not for everyone, but it is a choice we should be able to make. And we should not have to go broke to do it. We need help to educate our children because the cost of having them live away from home is huge. In this we do not have a choice.

Our problem is that very few have access to Youth Allowance because of the Actual Means Test and Assets Test. Farm incomes can look very healthy at times but do not take into account principle repayments made on land or machinery. Our inputs are enormous but are very often not fully tax deductible, yet still need to be paid. We have little or no disposable income. This is borne out by the fact that all farming families in this area are extending overdrafts to a point never seen before and still we can't meet the eligibility criteria. It is ridiculous applying the AMT to Partnerships, when the ability to "hide" income is non-existent.

In short we should be able to educate our children in an environment that city people take for granted. It is true we choose to live where we do, but we should not be treated as second class citizens because we do. We contribute substantially to this State's export income, when we

prosper, so does the State. Surely we should be able to access some form of assistance. We do not send our children away to be educated because it is the "thing to do". We do not go further into debt because we like the feeling!.. We send them away because we feel - *know* - that it is the best thing we can do for them.

Our two eldest are just completing university this year and already they thank us for the opportunities we have given them. They know this did not come without some considerable pain and are doubly grateful.

Help us educate our children. We want young people who will contribute to society - not be a burden on it!!