

The national office started up again in the week bushfires hit Canberra. It was a terrifying time but thankfully no-one in the office was directly affected. Thank you to all who sent messages of concern and our best wishes to those who are now battling fires in other parts of the country.

Volunteer Grants

As we watch with amazement what volunteer firefighters are prepared to do, it is timely that the Department of Family and Community Services has just announced the availability of Volunteer Small Equipment Grants to be funded through the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy. The grants are designed to provide funding of up to \$5,000 each to help organisations purchase equipment in the direct support of volunteers whose work contributes to benefiting families and communities. The equipment should directly assist volunteers by making their volunteering activities easier, safer or more enjoyable. See

www.facs.gov.au/sfcs/funding/sml_eouip_grants.htm

The 2003 Agenda

In 2003 the national office is embarking on several new tasks. Thanks to an additional grant from ANTA we will be able to enhance our research capacity. We want to map the

adult learning sector and uncover best practice—please tell us what you do best!—as well as to manage several particular projects. These include building a website about learning communities; developing a learning audit tool to assist employment agencies identify the learning needs and barriers of job seekers; investigating information literacy; and evaluating learning circles.

Healthy Ageing

ALA will also be continuing in its advocacy role. One issue gaining considerable attention at present is that of the ageing population. ALA has made a submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Ageing Inquiry. See www.ala.asn.au/docs/ageing.pdf and www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/ageing/strategies/index.htm.

You will also be interested to know about the Positive Ageing Community Sponsorship Grants of between \$500 and \$5,000 for projects which have the capacity to achieve positive outcomes for ageing Australians. **The closing date for applications is Friday 14 February 2003.** See

www.health.gov.au/acc/ofoa/awards/comgrants.htm.

IT skills for older workers

The Minister for Education, Science and Training, Brendan Nelson, has announced that the Basic IT Enabling Skills (BITES) for Older Workers scheme will be administered by five brokers who will manage delivery of training through a network of RTOs. The brokers are the NSW State Training Services, Victorian Centre for Adult Education, Mission Australia in Southeast Queensland and Western Australia, Learning Network Queensland and Spence Institute of TAFE. For more information go to itskills.dest.gov.au

Adult Learners' Week – Understand your world

Planning for Adult Learners' Week 2003 (1-8 September) is underway, with the likely theme of literacy (this being the beginning of the International Decade on Literacy) in its broadest sense (e.g. basic literacy, financial literacy, media literacy etc.). To assist with the campaign, in particular to help us show the Australian public what adult literacy education involves, we invite you to send j.cross@ala.asn.au details and/or photos of the various programs you run that help people develop skills in the different areas of literacy.

John Cross remains deeply involved in ALW but is also assuming the job of Research Manager. We are therefore in the process of recruiting a new member of the team, whose job will be to manage the promotional aspects of ALW as well as ALA's communications.

Research

Don't miss an opportunity to pursue your dream project. If you have an interest in intergenerational learning (for example what and how learning takes place within the family, or how grandparents and grandchildren help each other to learn), please note that we have extended the deadline for applications for the ALA-ANTA Innovation Grant for another fortnight, until 14 February. See www.ala.asn.au/research/grant.html for details.

NCVER, on behalf of the National Research and Evaluation Committee (NREC), will advertise funding for vocational education and training (VET) research very soon. The focus of this research program will be on:

- Learners - particularly Indigenous learners and 13-19 year olds
- VET in the broader educational and community context - including the contribution of VET to innovation
- Training providers - particularly assessment issues and pedagogy given student learning styles
- Industry and employers - their training practices, particularly for the training of existing workers
- Specific issue projects such as unmet student demand for VET, reasons for non-completion of training.

There will also be an open category. Keep your eye on www.ncver.edu.au

Tax

Each year the Australian Tax Office prepares a Compliance Plan. This is a public document which details how the ATO manages risk across the whole community - from individuals, through micro business to large business and the non-profit and government segment. See www.ato.gov.au/content.asp?doc=/content/corporate/complan.htm

I have now posted several messages about tax in The Current—without any response. I would be very interested to know whether this information is useful to readers. You can reply to f.beddie@ala.asn.au.

Website of the Month

“Learnativity” (www.learnativity.com) is described as an intersection of “learning, productivity, creativity and activity... an idea, a practice, and a bringing-together of concepts important to almost everyone wanting to succeed in the new century.” In a clear writing style and straightforward design, the site publishes a wealth of original material about issues and concepts related to these ideas, also providing annotated references and links for those who want to find out more.

On the Ground

We are putting together the next edition of the newsletter at the moment. If you have news or examples of that best practice mentioned above, please send brief reports (150-200 words if possible) to m.bates@ala.asn.au

I'm looking forward to 2003 but hoping it's cooler and calmer than January has been.

Francesca Beddie
Executive Director, Adult Learning Australia