

## FROM THE GUEST EDITOR BARBARA PAMPHILON



Helping with the production of this edition of the ALA newsletter as guest editor has really brought home to me the diversity of adult learning across the country, and indeed, as John Cross' article illustrates, across the world. And as I interviewed our new Executive Director, Francesca Beddie, at the National Office, I was further reminded of the contexts and settings of our work.

I wonder what members from around the country think when they read those words "National Office". Before I moved to Canberra, I pictured national organisations located in modern office blocks close to Parliament House, side by side with government departments and other national bodies. The reality for ALA and many other peak organisations is far from this.

Just like much of the work of our ALA member organisations, the National Office is located in a community space that is part of a school and adjacent to a small neighbourhood shopping centre comprising a supermarket and a few specialist small businesses. Next door is a church and meeting hall and behind, the playing fields of the primary school. Due to suburban demographic changes, the wing of the school has been reallocated for community use,

an interesting indicator of the shifting community needs for learning space allocation.

When you walk into the community wing, the first tenant is a ballet school and, depending on the time of day, there will be excited children and music cascading from the rooms. At other times there will be working bees of women sewing in the costume room, sharing their creative skills and learnings.

Next you pass a community access program for people living with disability. Their activity room can be equally active as participants learn social skills and undertake specialised programs. At other times staff will be undertaking training or working with the volunteers that support their clients.

Finally at the end of the corridor is HERDSA, the office of the Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia, whose work supports educators in the tertiary sector across Australia and our region. Here the buzz is from computers, faxes, e-mails and the information technology of our world.

And ALA? – an open plan office shared by the admin staff, (Margaret Bates, Phil Robson and a new staff member, Jenny Jankowski), a second shared space for Learning Circles (Mary Hannan) and Adult Learners'

Week (John Cross) and yes, just as in many adult learning settings even our Executive Director shares her space – with the library.

For me, such a location for ALA is highly symbolic, placed as it is in the midst of a rich and diverse learning mini-community that engages children, parents, workers, volunteers, special interest groups and businesses. Of course, I wish that each staff member had their own office with space for quiet concentration, but on the other hand located as they are, they are immersed in the real world of learning, from the informal to formal. No ivory towers here. And the staff have asked me to pass on the invitation that if you are visiting Canberra, drop in and see them, phone 02 6251 7933.

And now, on to the contributions in this edition – look out for the information on our next National Conference to be held in Hobart in August – a great chance to meet a wide range of people who support learning across our country. You will also find a new section in our newsletter on 'Learning Communities' – we plan that this feature will be an ongoing highlight in our future editions. ■

*Barbara Pamphilon*