ASSOCIATION FOR LEARNING MANDARIN IN AUSTRALIA Inc (ALMA) - ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Committee Report 2014-2015

This is the annual report on behalf of the Association for Learning Mandarin in Australia, or ALMA, committee in regards to its activities for the financial year 2014-2015 as required by the constitution.

Although the Association is a not for profit organisation, it raises funds through financial memberships to ALMA, but mainly through childcare fees from attendance at the Chinese Australian Early Childhood Centre (CAECC). As at 20th October, ALMA has 67 members: 50 families, 15 individuals and 2 associations. The Centre has been operating at full capacity over the last 12 months, and has a healthy waiting list for future enrolments.

There were several event highlights over the last 12 months. The most anticipated for families at the end of each year is the Centre’s End of Year concert. Every year, the staff and children seem to outdo themselves with amazing performances. It is perhaps the best opportunity for families and other invited guests to experience the children’s grasp and progression of both English and Mandarin languages, with ease and enjoyment; and in song no less.

Most years, 2015 being no exception, ALMA and CAECC participate in the Multicultural Festival in February. ALMA was awarded a multicultural grant for the children from the Centre to be part of the children’s parade dressed in gorgeous traditional Chinese costumes. The staff, children and families had much fun parading through the streets of Civic waving colourful fans and flags.

In April, on behalf of ALMA, Glynis-Anne Buckley (our Secretary, Anna) arranged the visit of Professor Ap Kup Vyt Vt (Luo Qing Chun) Dean of Yi Studies at the South West University of Nationalities in Chengdu to the Centre and Mawson Primary School. Professor Ap captivated the children at the Centre with a traditional story in Mandarin, and engaged the students at the school with a poem in the Yi language. It was a very successful event for all involved.

ALMA was instrumental in the establishment of a cross-sectoral working group to consider how to enhance Chinese language and culture education in the ACT. The group was chaired by the Education and Training Directorate and included representatives from mainstream and community language schools as well as the Australian National University (ANU), University of Canberra (UC) and other community groups. A *Blueprint for Mandarin Language and Chinese Culture Education* *in the ACT* outlining what is already happening and how all these stakeholders could cooperate in the future has just been released. One outcome of the Blueprint initiative was a one-off small grant program: the ACT Government Mandarin Culture and Language Grants. ALMA applied for one of these grants, in partnership with the Centre on China in the World (CIW) at the ANU, and was itself a partner in two other grant applications: one with the Federation of Chinese Community of Canberra Inc and the other with Mawson Primary School. All three of these applications were successful, which is an amazing achievement! Sincere thanks to Dr. Mandy Scott who contributed significantly to these submissions on behalf of the Association.

ALMA continues to work with Mawson Primary School in promoting their Mandarin program, which will be further strengthened with the successful joint grant. ALMA has been delighted to learn of the introduction of Mandarin for the first time this year to the Pre-school children. This has been a notable gap in the journey for children attending the CAECC and primary school. It also provides children with no previous exposure to Mandarin an easier transition into the language program at the school.

A committee visit to the Canberra Grammar School’s *Snow Centre for Education in the Asian Century* has been organised for November this year. It is hoped that this may foster further collaborations between Canberra Grammar and ALMA into the future.

An ongoing activity of ALMA is the community-tutoring project, also run by Mandy Scott. This project introduces Mandarin learners to fluent Mandarin speakers in the ACT area who volunteer to help the former understand Chinese language and culture. In 2015 there were 26 learners and 26 tutors involved with this project, with a number of them being students at ANU. In collaboration with Lucia Lu, Mandy also presents a half hour Mandarin language community radio program on 2XXFM. This program promotes the use and learning of Mandarin in the ACT and informs the community, especially the Chinese speaking community, about local events and other information of interest. Children can also enjoy a bedtime story, such as the Gruffalo, read in Mandarin.

In terms of the Centre’s venue, the management of the Centre facility was transferred to ACT Property Group this year. The committee saw this as an opportunity to recommence negotiations for an extension of the Centre; especially to create separate, more age appropriate spaces for babies and toddlers. Subsequent to writing to the Chief Minister outlining our requests, we received endorsement from Mr Barr to progress work with ACT Property Group for the 2016/2017 budget. On 20th August I met with two senior managers from ACT Property Group along with Amanda Andrews, the Principal of Mawson Primary, and Judy, our Director. After some discussion of the issues, agreement was reached that a qualified architect would be engaged by ACT Property Group to draw up plans in negotiation with the school in terms of available land. This work is currently in progress.

Regarding the Centre Management, an education staff salary policy was instituted in 2014 by the previous committee. This year it was reviewed to include the administration staff. We are proud to be able to offer all our staff above award rates at this time to acknowledge service and relevant qualifications.

The Centre generally maintains a low turnover of staff, indicating staff satisfaction with employment conditions at the Centre, and stability of relationships for our children. We were sad to see Ling Ling leave to further her career at another centre, and Haiying, who left for Adelaide with her husband and delightful daughter, Shing Shing (who has been missed by the older children). However, we are delighted to welcome Yanli to the preschool room and Jenny and Leslie into the toddler room.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank our illustrious Director, Judy, exceedingly able Assistant Director, Laura, (who is expecting her baby any day) and all the Centre staff for their wonderful care and education provided to our children. I would also like to acknowledge the work of our administration staff, Kathleen and Piu, who go way above and beyond their administrative duties.

Thanks also goes to Carol Hsu, our diligent treasurer, who has worked very hard this year to ensure the integrity of the finances of the Association and the Centre. She kindly took over the role from Paul Lander earlier in the year due to his work commitments and we can be assured that with bookkeeper, Kathleen, and Carol’s attentions, our finances are in good health. Anna has set the bar exceedingly high with her work in crafting the ALMA newsletter. She has put tremendous effort into making the newsletters an event in themselves and a thoroughly enjoyable read. Thanks to all the committee members who have provided helpful advice, support, and enthusiasm to the committee and me this year. It has been a pleasure working with all.

I would like to give special mention to Len Waugh, a long-standing committee member of some 10 years, who has announced his resignation from the Committee to concentrate on his commitments with the Labor Party. He has provided invaluable support and knowledge to the numerous committees over the years and deserves a medal for his contributions. He will be a loss to ALMA, although we understand he will remain a member and continue to support the cause of promoting Mandarin across the ACT.

This is the last year my youngest daughter will be attending the CAECC, and it will be a teary farewell to caring people, the Centre, the School and Canberra as we make a new life in Adelaide. We wish ALMA, CAECC and all the families that come and go through the Centre every success in the coming years.

I hereby submit this report to the meeting.

Kelly McGorm

Outgoing President

ALMA Committee

20 October 2015.