

President's Report April 2024

Strategic Direction 2023-2026

At the ASLA Board face-to-face meeting in September, the Board formulated the Strategic Directions for 2023-2026. Before the meeting, ASLA members were surveyed to ensure that these directions were built on member needs. The results were as follows:

Five strengths of being a member of ASLA

- *Networking and Community Building*
Respondents value ASLA for the opportunities it provides to connect with like-minded colleagues and learn from each other. Networking and sharing knowledge with peers in the profession are highly regarded. ASLA is valued as a community of professionals, providing collegial support and a sense of belonging. Being part of a national body and collaborating with colleagues are mentioned as benefits along with the facilitation of professional relationships and friendships among teacher librarians, fostering a sense of community. ASLA is seen as a platform for professionals to stand together and support each other in their roles.
- *Professional Development and access to resources including professional guidelines.*
Access to professional learning opportunities, including webinars, conferences, and workshops, is a key benefit of ASLA membership. Many respondents appreciate the PD sessions, ACCESS magazine, and webinars that keep them updated on best practices and trends. ASLA is appreciated for providing information on developments in libraries and the education landscape. ASLA is seen as a source of current and relevant information, helping library staff stay up-to-date with best practices and trends. Respondents appreciate ASLA's efforts to keep them informed. ASLA's role in providing professional guidelines, documentation, and support in policy development is also recognised.
- *Advocacy and Representation*
ASLA's role in advocacy for school libraries and teacher librarians is valued by respondents. They appreciate ASLA's advocacy documents, policy development, and representation on behalf of school libraries. Some respondents emphasise ASLA's role in advocating for the profession of teacher librarians, highlighting the importance of having a national body for this purpose. ASLA's role in promoting the credibility of school libraries and the profession is acknowledged.
- *Support for Library Roles*
ASLA is appreciated for its support of all roles in school libraries.

Five visions for the future

- *Advocacy*

Many respondents emphasise the need for continued advocacy for school libraries and teacher librarians. They would like ASLA to advocate for school library funding, the presence of TLs in schools, and the recognition of their roles and contributions. They stress the need for a strong, united national body that represents all states equally. They want ASLA to have a presence in national education initiatives and advocate for teacher librarians at the federal level.

- *Professional Development and Training:*
Several respondents express a desire for more training opportunities, especially for staff in smaller libraries and those transitioning between primary and secondary libraries. They also mention the importance of mentorship programs and courses to upskill TLs.
- *Networking and Collaboration*
There is a strong emphasis on the importance of networking and collaboration, both within ASLA and with other local members. Respondents want opportunities to connect with colleagues, share ideas, and learn from each other.
- *Resource Sharing*
Some respondents suggest centralising and curating resources for school library staff, including free resources. They also mention sharing ideas and materials among library professionals.
- *Inclusion and Equity*
Respondents mention the importance of equity, including central funding for school libraries, realistic staffing levels, and support for public schools. They also highlight the need for resources and support for those working alone in public schools with limited funding. There is a call for support and recognition for individuals working in school libraries who may not have a formal teacher librarian.

In response to this feedback, we devised five strategic directions.

New strategic directions

1. Visibility through an updated and reinvigorated website and social media
2. Improving partnerships with other organisations
3. Connection both across the country and through exciting new opportunities to connect within our local areas and states.

Ongoing strategic directions

4. Mentoring program to run again in 2024.
5. Professional Learning

Progress of Strategic Directions

1. Visibility through an updated and reinvigorated website and social media

Our website is static and difficult to navigate in order to find information. We are in the process of sourcing three quotes to redesign and reinvigorate it with more accessibility and new interactive, community building features.

Board member Deborah Brown has taken on the responsibility of our social media accounts with the twin aims of being a place of information for members, including events and resources and a community where members can share ideas.

2. Improving partnerships with other organisations

The DANZ Awards

The DANZ awards were launched at our 2023 ASLA Conference and the first year was concluded with the presentation of the winners at Somerset Storyfest in March by Sally Rippin, the 2024/25 Australian Children's Laureate. The winners are:

Picture Book

Come Over to My House by Sally Rippin and Eliza Hull and illustrated by Daniel Gray-Barnett

Chapter Book

Maku by Meyne Wyatt

Middle Grade

The Wintrish Girl by Melanie La'Brooy

It was a very successful first year, the response to the longlist from publishers was huge and the list will be published as a resource for schools and bookshops. This is particularly exciting as the goal of the awards is to recognise and celebrate positive, inclusive diversity in children's literature and therefore the publication of the longlist provides a resource for book buyers and educators to stock books which have been given a seal of approval from a diverse, cross section of judges. Additionally, in response to demand we will be expanding the awards to include other categories such as Young Adult, Non-fiction, Graphic Novels and Poetry in 2025 and we are currently looking for funding to support this.

In 2024 ASLA took ownership of the DANZ Awards, which will now be known as The ASLA DANZ Awards. Kate Foster will still be working with us as coordinator.

Australian Children's Laureate Foundation Partnership

We are currently developing a Memorandum of Understanding with The ACLF to partner with them to hold a Laureate Week in 2025.

This week would fund author visits to regional and remote schools (ASLA member schools in the first instance) that would not otherwise be able to host these events.

The goal of this proposal is to allow more students around Australia to experience the benefits of an author or illustrator visit and to support school libraries by putting a spotlight on library spaces in schools as a reminder of how valuable and important they are.

3. Connection both across the country and through exciting new opportunities to connect within our local areas and states.

Our Tasmanian Board members, Marc Mumford and Catherine Woodberry are working towards creating a Tasmanian ASLA subcommittee. They are also in the planning stages for a Tasmanian mini conference in the second half of 2024.

4. Mentoring Program

The ASLA mentoring program has almost finished its first year and plans are underway for the next round starting with expressions of interest in May.

After checking in with all mentors and mentees Board members, Sonja Brownridge and Kate Hodgson summarise the following takeaways from the program so far:

- Both mentors and mentees valued the chance to connect with somebody who spoke the same "library language"
- Regional/remote members were very grateful to have someone to connect with at a professional level
- The majority of participants indicated that the initial compulsory training session was very useful, as it set the ground rules for the program
- Many would like to see a regular get-together where casual conversations could take place.
- There have been some very creative ways that mentors and mentees have supported one another and relationships that have formed have been very positive.
- Some mentees/mentors felt that the distance between the two members of a pairing was a problem due to time differences between States. Others felt it was advantageous to have a mentee or mentor in a different State as it allowed for more varied perspectives.

These insights were shared with Dr Nancy Bonfiglio-Pavisich and are being taken into consideration for the 2024/25 program.

5. Professional Learning

Webinars

In response to very strong feedback from members all webinars are free in 2024. This has resulted in high attendance for the first three webinars this year, particularly February's *But I saw it on Booktok by Emily Feetham*.

Courageous Conversations

In response to positive feedback for Dr Nancy's mentoring program, ASLA created the Courageous Conversations Professional Learning Opportunity. The workshops blend theory and practice to examine conflict styles, navigate challenging situations, examine effective communication processes, embrace empathy, establish respectful, trusting environments and develop actionable steps to bring positive change.

The first session was held in March.

Conferences

As 2024 is not a conference year we decided to concentrate on presenting at and sponsoring various association and network conferences to offer Professional Learning opportunities as well as raise awareness and advocate for school libraries amongst key stakeholders.

To raise awareness amongst school leaders and other school staff we sponsored the Future Libraries Stream at EduTech in Melbourne in August 2023 including a keynote presentation to school leaders and trade booth.

We are sponsoring the TLPC (Teacher Librarian Professional Learning Community) Conference in Canberra in May where Board member Suzanne Livett will also give a presentation.

We will have a presence at the ALEA (Australian Literacy Educators' Association) National Conference in Adelaide in July to speak with literacy educators about the importance of school libraries and how we can collaborate in literacy education.

A Conference Committee has been put together and planning is underway for our 2025 Conference.

Advocacy

In December 2023 ASLA joined the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA), Queensland School Library Association (QSLA); School Library Association of New South Wales (SLANSW); School Library Association of South Australia (SLASA); School Library Association of Victoria (SLAV); Western Australian School Library Association (WASLA); and the Australian School Library Association (ASLA)

to form The Australian Coalition for School Libraries (ACSL)

The aim of ACSL is to provide one national voice for school libraries in Australia, a **united and professional voice on issues affecting school libraries and support for school library staff across Australia.**

Being a member of ACSL amplifies our advocacy voice and consolidates the efforts of all associations into a collaborative advocacy strategy. By pooling our skills and resources in this way, enables ASLA to also spend more time and resources on our strategic directions, membership support and Professional Learning.

So far ASLA has worked within ACSL to:

- Write a submission to the Inquiry into Literacy and Numeracy in ACT public schools, in conjunction with ALIA and three ACT Teacher Librarians Emily Squires, Rebecca Cameron and Sally Allen that:

As a matter of equity, a target that every ACT public school student has access to a well-resourced school library run by qualified staff.

The Education Directorate develop a central register on the provision, resourcing and staffing of school libraries to provide a source of data to track impact on literacy and numeracy outcomes.

Expansion of the current teacher librarian initiatives (scholarship program and roll-out of centrally funded positions), supplemented by opportunities for library-specific training for educational support staff.

- Create a media release in response to ACER's snapshot report that analyses the PIRLS data and finds (unsurprisingly) a correlation between borrowing books and reading comprehension, as well as some data on how often students borrow books.

Representatives of ACSL have met with Education Minister Jason Clare's office advisory, Dan Skehan to introduce ACSL and establish a relationship.

Martha Itzcovitz
ASLA President

