



PRESIDENT'S ANNUAL REPORT 2009

It is with pleasure that I present the President's report for the year to 30 June 2009. This is my third annual report, and I believe it covers one of our most successful years, and certainly our most satisfying during my tenure as President. In this report I will outline our major achievements and try to define the path forward from here.

With some 1560 members at time of writing, we are certainly a large organisation, and certainly among the largest of its kind anywhere in Australia. As I am fond of telling people, we have the numbers of a reasonably-sized high school. Moreover, I understand that the model we use for the bulk of our teaching, whereby we go into learners' homes and teach them on their own computers, is unique. I believe there is a real need for it to be replicated in other parts of Australia. That figure of 1560 members is an increase of 10% over the past 12 months. This might not sound like much, but given that a large proportion of our learners, having completed the curriculum, choose not to renew, it is quite satisfying. Perhaps a more meaningful figure is the 927 new members we welcomed during the year.

In November, Mrs Val French, the founder and president of Older People Speak Out (OPSO), very kindly agreed to become our inaugural Patron. Val, a former journalist and journalism lecturer, is well-known and highly respected as an authority on social issues affecting older people. We are greatly honoured to have her as our patron.

Much of what we achieved related to the communications and marketing side of the organisation. While this might appear peripheral to our main activities, it is nonetheless vital if we are to attract new members and to communicate effectively with our current members. You will be aware that we commissioned the professional design of a new logo. Not only does it reproduce better in all forms of media, but it is more modern and distinctive, and better reflects the nature of what we do. Following immediately from that came a professional redesign of our brochure, business cards, letterhead and related material to give a cleaner and more modern look. The third such initiative we took in that area was a redevelopment of our website. The new site is far more attractive and far easier to navigate. It also provides greater functionality. We can now update the information much easier, send personalised emails in bulk to different categories of member and process online membership applications. Shortly, we hope also to have a system whereby members will be able to register online for our training sessions. We tried but were unable to find the skills necessary for these tasks from among our membership. Consequently, the logo, brochure and website were all done commercially.

During the first part of the year, there was a successful publicity and advertising campaign, the advertising being helped greatly by a \$6700 grant from Brisbane City Council. As a measure of this success, some 38% of our new members joined in the 3-month period starting 1 January, which is when most of this push took place. Last year I expressed great concern about our shortage of mentors and the consequentially long times that many new learners had to wait before they could receive lessons. By targeting our advertising we have redressed that imbalance in most areas.

Computing for the over 50s

Office and City Training Centre: Harris Terrace, 46 George Street, Brisbane 4001
Mail: PO Box 13079, George Street Post Shop, Brisbane 4003
Email: bsolhq@bsol.asn.au | Website: www.bsol.asn.au | Phone: 07 3210 6983

Patron:

Val French
AM, M Lit Stud, BA

Our training sessions continue to be enormously popular, and we average 1-2 such sessions a week. This includes both lecture and hands-on sessions in roughly equal numbers. While our main thrust continues to be the teaching of a basic curriculum to the over-50s, the training sessions provide a number of very useful benefits. Firstly, they allow mentors and learners to extend their computer knowledge into areas beyond the basic curriculum. Secondly, for our mentors and other volunteers, the sessions are provided at no cost, and this allows us to recognise the invaluable contribution they make to the running of BSOL. Finally, the sessions act as a means of encouraging volunteers and learners to maintain their involvement with our organisation, and in particular for learners to renew their subscriptions.

With our training facilities being so well utilised, not only for training sessions per se but also for interest groups such as the Technical Support Club and the Video Editing Group, the Management Committee has provided strong support for the purchase of equipment for the training area. As well as the 45 chairs mentioned in last year's report, we now have an excellent PA system with radio microphones, a new PC (itself built as a training exercise by the Technical Support Club) and a video camera to record selected training sessions. A large proportion of these purchases was funded by the \$2700 in fees earned from training sessions. By utilising a generous donation from Brisbane City Council, we have just purchased an impressive new Apple Mac, its predecessor having been so outdated that it was deemed no longer useful for lessons.

In line with our decentralised teaching model, we also provide support to the hubs when needed. A new training facility was established by North East Hub at the Zillmere PCYC. BSOL helped with the purchase of some equipment and we pay for the broadband connection. There are moves by Inner North Hub to establish something similar at the community facility within Stafford Heights Baptist Church.

Financially, we continue to be very sound. As you will hear shortly from our Treasurer, we showed a modest gain in funds during the year. This was despite an unusually high level of one-off expenditure on capital items as well as on web page development and logo and brochure design.

Substantial progress was made on developing a code of conduct, to apply to all members of BSOL. The plan is to introduce it progressively, along with screening procedures for volunteers, over coming months.

Even though the past year has been one of notable successes, there are still things to be done. Having proved the benefits of a strong publicity and advertising drive, we want to continue our push for new members. Our mixed experience of trying to handle publicity in-house has led us to appoint a paid publicity consultant. We plan also to spend money again on paid advertising.

While the CTC is heavily utilised both for one-on-one lessons and for general training, there are times in the week when there is still spare capacity. I would like to see it even more fully utilised.

In times gone by, BSOL organised quite a few social events, such as barbecues, for all members. In recent years, there has been nobody willing to organise such events, so the practice largely died out. It would be good to see someone take on that role, and for us to have regular social get-togethers once again.

We have put a lot of effort into encouraging our mentors to upgrade their skills so they can teach Vista with confidence. This has been largely successful, though there still remains a significant number of mentors unable to be assigned to learners with Vista machines. With the

imminent release of Windows 7, there will be a need for mentors who are confident to teach it, and accordingly for us to provide training to our mentors.

Back in 2007, BSOL ran two one-day workshops for mentors under the title “Technology Survival Skills.” I believe the incoming committee should consider something similar for 2010.

Finally, some heart-felt thanks. BSOL relies 100% on volunteers, and there are simply too many to mention by name. On behalf of the Management Committee, I acknowledge the work done by our dedicated and reliable office volunteers and our trainers. BSOL owes its continued existence to our hub coordinators and mentors, and we greatly appreciate all that they do for us. My personal thanks go to the fellow members of the Management Committee for their strong support throughout the year. I greatly appreciate that support. You didn’t just make my job easier. You made it possible.

The results speak for themselves. It has been a very successful year.

Hub	Learners	Mentors	Supporters	Office Volunteers	Hon.Life Members	Totals
Apple Mac	47	15				62
Bayside	105	30				135
Central	116	51	3	4		174
East	128	31		2	1	162
Inner North	100	27				127
Inner West	101	30	1	1		133
North	107	30				137
North Central	107	29	1		1	138
North East	120	29				149
South	128	55		1		184
West	68	31				99
Totals	1127	358	5	8	2	1500

Brian Korner
September 2009