

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2008

This is my second annual report to you as President of Brisbane Seniors Online. Taken overall, I certainly believe this past year has been a highly successful one, with most of our objectives realised.

We are in a strong position in terms of recognition among our target community, and in terms of our membership numbers, range and level of training activities and our financial situation. We still face challenges, and I will discuss them in more detail over the next few minutes.

Firstly, we continue to attract new learners to BSOL and, generally speaking, we are able to help them gain the requisite computer skills. What those 'requisite computer skills' are is something I'll cover in more detail in a moment. The greatest single challenge for us continues to be finding sufficient mentors to teach all our waiting learners, and this year more than ever, we have seen waiting lists in some areas become far longer than we'd like. In fact, we are increasingly having to offer refunds to learners who have been waiting for months at a time - a necessary move, but one which I find personally disappointing. It means that we are not totally fulfilling our primary objective.

I believe that broadly, there are two ways we can reduce our learner waiting lists. The most obvious one is to recruit more mentors - and we have already increased our advertising and promotional activities while directing the emphasis towards mentor, rather than learner, recruitment. Our Publicity Officer, Dick Bennett, has been working hard on this, and we are certainly seeing some reward for those efforts. It hasn't solved the mentor shortage, but it is certainly helping.

The second way of reducing waiting lists is for us to utilise our mentors more effectively. Time after time, mentors have expressed concern to me about the length of time that they might spend with an individual learner, as they are unsure when they should terminate the arrangement, or indeed how they are to do so. In every mentor training session I'm involved in, I can be confident this will be the principal concern. "How and when can I stop teaching a particular learner?" In an attempt to clarify the situation, we have now introduced a 12-lesson guideline. Note this is a guideline rather than an inflexible rule, but it gives our mentors some indication of the time typically required to cover our core curriculum in one-on-one lessons. I am confident that if we are able to utilise our mentors' time more efficiently, it will make a big difference to those waiting lists.

I referred earlier to our core curriculum. Arising from the two TSS Workshops we conducted last year for our mentors was the formation of a sub-committee to review our curriculum. The results of their work were ratified at a meeting for all mentors in July this year. All learners would be entitled to lessons in computer security, basics of the computer operating system, email, the internet and basic word processing. In other words, this would form our core curriculum. Where appropriate, we would offer classes or individual sessions in a variety of other computer-related topics - but would not guarantee to do so or to cover any specific topic beyond those I have just described. While I acknowledge that support for this approach was not unanimous, it certainly has the support of the vast majority of our hub coordinators and mentors, and goes a long way towards clarifying the expectations we place on our mentors and what it is we are offering to potential learners. There have certainly been times, particularly in the past 12 months when I have seen how easy it is to lose sight of our aims and objectives, and of the reason that BSOL was formed in the first place. That reason is just as relevant today as it was back in 2001 when BSOL was formed to help those people in the Greater Brisbane area aged over 50 who have been left behind by the so-called computer revolution. We provide

this help mostly through one-on-one teaching, and often in the learners' own homes. A few moments ago, I outlined the scope of these lessons - in other words our core curriculum. While we are certainly involved in other computer-related activities, and we do some teaching beyond the core curriculum I do feel that sometimes we need to pause and remind ourselves of those aims and objectives.

I'll turn now to other matters. As you are doubtless aware, until March of this year, we were fortunate to have the stalwart Hazel Imison looking after all our data entry work plus looking after a major part of the general administrative workload involved in running an organisation of the size and complexity of BSOL. Her retirement to the Sunshine Coast left us with a very big hole to fill - its full size only becoming apparent in the months which followed. I'm pleased that things have settled down now, with Kate Jenkins handling the bulk of the data entry work, and Jonathan Martin looking after the large volume of incoming emails and generally directing traffic. Our wonderful team of office volunteers has had to handle an increased workload and responsibilities as result of these changes, and they really have risen to the challenge.

This time last year, our website was being hosted by an outside organisation on behalf of Brisbane City Council. We were already under notice that the arrangement was going to cease in January 2008, and that we would be responsible for paying the exorbitant costs of hosting and technical support. Through the hard work and great technical expertise of one of our mentors, Barry Thompson, the website was redeveloped, which allowed us then to migrate it across to a free web-hosting service. It's a bit sad that our own Brisbane City Council is no longer prepared to cover the website costs of community organisations, yet we are able to find a commercial web-hosting company which is prepared to do so. The website is certainly functioning better than ever, though I personally believe it is still not visually attractive. If anyone knows an expert in web-page design, that is the aesthetics of it, who might be able to help us, I'd be most interested to hear from them.

This year has seen a large number of training sessions offered on a great range of technical and non-technical topics. I particularly mention the sessions on Windows Vista, designed particularly to familiarise our mentors with the latest Microsoft operating system. It's pleasing to see how popular our sessions have become. We recently had a blitz to remove all the old broken and obsolete computers and equipment plus a large volume of unwanted furniture from the training area. This freed up a lot of space, enabling us to purchase 45 new stackable chairs. This has doubled our seating capacity, allowing us to better handle the growing popularity of our training sessions.

Recently, two of our trainers, Brenda Williams and John Noad, have started videoing their training sessions and later editing in some animated screenshots. The resultant DVDs are of a very high standard.

This time last year, I listed nine objectives for 2007/8, which I grandly titled a development plan. I'm pleased to advise that we have met most of these objectives. Increased publicity has definitely raised the profile of BSOL, and with a membership of 1402, we have comfortably exceeded the target set last year of 1200. I had aimed to increase the proportion of mentors to 20%. The current figure is 19.1%, though I concede even that is over-optimistic, as it includes a number of mentors who aren't really active. You shortly hear from Ann Nicholls our Treasurer and yes, the our revenue did exceed our expenditure. Our cash balance is some \$4000 more than it was this time last year, and this is despite the purchase of several items of capital equipment. There was an objective to run at least eight general training sessions and two mentor training sessions during the year. I haven't done a count, but there were certainly well over eight training sessions, plus the two mentor sessions. Another objective was to ensure that we have backup

people for all of the key administrative functions. That one is still a work in progress, and I rate us as being about halfway there. Thanks largely to Brenda, the CTC equipment is being well utilised for hands-on training sessions. As already mentioned, the website has been successfully migrated. The final two objectives were to complete a review of the aims and objectives of BSOL, and to review and revise the BSOL curriculum. I'm pleased to advise that both of these are now complete.

A volunteer organisation of some 1300 members requires a great deal of work from a great number of people to keep it running successfully. On behalf of the Management Committee, I express our deep gratitude to all those who have helped us over the past year. I feel I would be taking on too big a risk to try and list everybody by name, as there are bound to be names which get overlooked. In general terms therefore we thank our office volunteers, our hub coordinators, all those mentors who ran training sessions throughout the year and everyone else who helped to run and to promote BSOL. A few minutes ago, I described our mentors as being a most valuable resource. I mean it, and on behalf of the Management Committee I thank our mentors for all the wonderful work that they do. Finally, my personal thanks go to the small but hard-working Management Committee - Pat, Michel, Peter, Ann and Anne-Gabrielle - for their support throughout the year.

When approached a few weeks ago, I agreed to stand for a third term as President of Brisbane Seniors OnLine. At time of writing this report, nominations for the 2009 committee have closed and I'm unaware of any other nominees for the position. I immodestly predict therefore that I will be re-elected to the position. While I agreed to renominate as President, it is appropriate to state that 2009 will be my final term as President. In the meantime, I will certainly do everything that I can to make 2009 as a year of further advancement and successes for Brisbane Seniors OnLine.

I move that the President's report be adopted.

Brian Korner  
September 2008

<b>Hub</b>	<b>Learners</b>	<b>Mentors</b>	<b>Supporters</b>	<b>Office Volunteers</b>	<b>Hon.Life Members</b>	<b>Totals</b>
Central	162	39	3	5		<b>209</b>
East	161	35	2	1		<b>199</b>
Inner North	93	17				<b>110</b>
Inner West	124	24	1	2		<b>151</b>
North	57	20				<b>77</b>
North Central	98	20	1		1	<b>120</b>
North East	199	26	2			<b>227</b>
South	146	49	1	2		<b>198</b>
West	85	38				<b>123</b>
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1125</b>	<b>268</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1414</b>