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It is ironic that as the world seems to be shrinking, as technology gives us improved access to news, views and information, the physical isolation of some parts of Australia has worsened.

Late last year I visited Cairns and Mt Isa on business, and took the opportunity to meet with ALIA members. Mt Isa, in common with other outback centres, has fallen victim to rationalisation of air services.

Although members in Cairns and Mt Isa are accepting of their isolation, they had some concrete suggestions when I asked how the Association could help isolated members.

Professional development is at the top of the list of their needs. The Cairns members suggested that as Cairns is an international airport when overseas guests come for conferences and seminars they could start or finish their trips in Cairns. Alternatively, round-Australia tickets, which I was assured are a very economical proposition, could be used to facilitate visits to the far-flung corners of this country.

The group in Mt Isa made no bones about the fact that they did not expect anyone to trek all the way to the Isa just to talk to them, but they intimated that they would be unfailingly grateful for access to audio-cassettes or home videos of continuing education activities held in more populous centres.

The Western Australian Branch provides such a service in the West. The Board of Education has instituted a program which will meet the needs of isolated members, but it is a slow process to develop packages for individual or small group use.

The Association does not have the resources to establish a central-

ised program of taping presentations all over the country. Nor does it have the staff to make tapes and videos available through a lending service located at National Office.

But that does not mean that we should accept that there is nothing to be done.

In very short order a lively program could be in place if individual members, divisions, sections and special interest groups accepted responsibility for sharing professional development opportunities.

It has been the custom, when overseas speakers are visiting, to circulate the executive of divisions well in advance, in order that they may avail themselves of the opportunity to arrange workshops or seminars. This tends to result in visits to capital cities.

If we changed that custom and instead the organisers of the primary 'event' ascertained from the speaker whether he or she was willing to travel, and the general geographic areas that would be acceptable, and disseminated that information through *inCite*, together with the undertaking to assist in coordinating travel, members in smaller centres would be better positioned to take advantage of opportunities they now miss out on.

And if, in addition, recording or videoing all speakers and advertising the availability of tapes and videos became as normal a part of organising an ALIA seminar or workshop as organising the catering is, the Association would be well on the way towards becoming a quite healthy co-mentoring organisation.

It is traditionally assumed that a mentoring relationship is an unequal one. An older, more experienced person takes a young person under his or her wing and guides

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and helps the younger to develop personally and professionally.

One of the many benefits I have had from my membership of the Association is the mentoring which flows naturally among equals, the mentoring which comes when you discuss issues and problems in your workplace with others in similar positions. It is the give-and-take relationship that one tends to develop with colleagues one meets through the Association and to maintain by phone, fax and mail.

If you work in an isolated situation and have limited access to opportunities to meet colleagues face to face, you are less likely to meet people with whom you can establish co-mentoring relationships.

I remember when, as the Librarian-in-Charge at one of the three TAFE Colleges in New South Wales that were not part of a Region, how grateful I was for the friendly voice of the Reader Services Librarian at Newcastle Technical College. Over the phone we discussed issues of mutual concern and sought each other's advice, developing a supportive co-mentoring relationship more than a year before we met. Fifteen years later that relationship is alive and well. One of the many pleasures this year will afford me is the opportunity to speak at the AGM of the Hunter Regional Group of which Diane Schofield is now President.

Diane held out the hand of friendship from a large college to an isolated colleague, a model which individual members of the Association could adopt. While it is possibly the most important thing you could do for the Association, the personal rewards which will come back to you will be immeasurable. ■