

Member to Associate		New Member			
Renee Stokes	WA	Kylie Quinn	TAS	Cheryl Taylor	VIC
Kysira Fairbairn	QLD	Sharlene Noble	SA	Caroline Piddington	QLD
Erica Cooke	QLD	Bronwyn Bulmer	QLD	Dayna Smith	QLD
Alexandra Daw	QLD	Shannon Franzway	QLD	Hayley Brooks	VIC
Stephanie Neille	WA	Elizabeth Williams	VIC	Kellie Slake	SA
Katherine Boyd	NSW	Narelle Hampe	NSW	Baden Hughes	QLD
Rebekah Lee	NSW	Helen Concha	NSW	Stephanie Bailey	NSW
Member to Technician		Laura Petralia	VIC	Emma Clift	NSW
Debra Gilmore	QLD	Carolyn Riordan	NSW	Anna Rubinowski	VIC
Gerry An	ACT	Jessica Bridges	WA	Talia Jasmine	VIC
Melissa Berends	VIC	Jennifer Wells	NSW	Stevens	VIC
New Associate		Natasha Anderson	NSW	Tania Pritchard	NSW
Erina Fukuhara	HKD	Kim Best	VIC	Shannon Parsons	VIC
Lorraine Heller-		Sebastian Chapman	NSW	Sharon Brady	NSW
Nicholas	VIC	Giuliana Hudson	NSW	Maria Melba Carpio	NSW
Tristan Alaba	NSW	James Rose	NSW	Ming-Lung Chen	NSW
Maria Savvidis	NSW	Sally Stewart	VIC	Alexandra Parker	NSW
Lars Kremers	WA	Stephanie Lee	VIC	Readmitting Associate	
Gareth Evens	VIC	Mary-Louise Jenkins	NSW	Mary Coghlan	VIC
Juliet Marconi	QLD	Julie Cleary	VIC	Christine Evans	TAS
Aaron Tze Jun Lim	VIC	Christina Belli	VIC	Jessica Brown	NSW
Ozge Sevindik-Alkan	VIC	Purjittam Yadav	SA	Diane Schofield	NSW
New Associate Allied Field		Katarzyna Stronias	QLD	Mary Carroll	VIC
Kristy Pallin	VIC	Helen White	NSW	Kristine Johnstone	VIC
New Institution		Iris Gonzales	NSW	Stacey Leaver	VIC
Presentation		Anita Witt	QLD	Kosana Troughton	QLD
College Windsor	VIC	Jennifer Price	NSW	Carrie Thomas	VIC
New Technician		Kaye Barrett	NSW	Michael Wallace	QLD
Meg Denman	TAS	Kathryn Bergstrum	VIC	Readmitting Institution	
Anusha Jebanasam	NSW	Alison Fullam	WA	Tweed Heads	
Anna Edwards	TAS	Yvonne Thomas	VIC	Hospital	NSW
Hellen Townsend	WA	Rebecca Rover	SA	Readmitting Member	
Jayne Hutchison	NT	Renae Callaway	NT	Cindy Scott-Findlay	NSW
Karina Oechsle	NSW	Kathleen Ashton	NSW	Kate Davis	QLD
		Sherilyn Burrows	QLD	Nell Hamilton	QLD
		Stephanie Knight	VIC		
		Jennifer Dogan	NSW		
		Hannah Kirby	QLD		
		Anne Wong	QLD		

**Correction:** The correct name for the 'sound chairs' on page 20 of the April edition of INCITE is 'Featherston talking chairs'.

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Last year, Nick Bland's wonderful story book, *The Very Cranky Bear*, led ALIA's National Simultaneous Storytime to achieve a record number of participants and readers across the country, including an unforgettable rendition performed at the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne by the audio book's talent, Angus Sampson. This year, we are thrilled to be sharing another of Nick's books, *The Wrong Book*, and to welcome Nick to INCITE's Last Word to share a bit about himself and how he creates such unique stories.

## Welcome Nick!

**This is your second time as a National Simultaneous Storytime author. Last year you participated by reading the story at a school some 70kms north of Darwin. What was that like? And what are your plans this year?**

I knew a local politician was participating in a *Cranky Bear* play that the children at Taminmin school were performing, but I wasn't sure which politician. The first I saw of him was during the play when he was wearing a full Bear suit. It was a lovely 34 degree Darwin day. When he finally removed his bear head, the sweatiest politician since Nixon during Watergate emerged for photos. Good on you, Gerry Wood.

**Though there are three Bear stories, this year we've chosen to leave him in his cave and read one of your other stories. Can you tell us a bit about *The Wrong Book*? What is it about, and where did the inspiration come from?**

*The Wrong Book* was my way of telling kids that getting your own way is a luxury not to be taken for granted. Nicholas Ickle is trying to tell a story, but he keeps getting interrupted by characters from other stories. By the time he tells them they're all in the wrong book and ejects them from his pages, the story is over and Nicholas reveals who the story was supposed to be about, '... me.'

When I was 2 ½ years old, I told my babysitter I had an 'Ickle' in my 'oot'. It took her some time to work out there was a pickle in my foot. I

# ast word

still talk regularly to that babysitter and the name Nicholas Ickle was a dedication to her.

**You both write and illustrate your books. Is there one or the other that you favour? About how long does it take to complete a book?**

I consider myself a writer who can draw a bit. I always wrote stories and drew cartoons as a kid and I really wanted to be a cartoonist. I started selling greeting card designs in my 20s which led on to doing a few readers for educational publishers in Melbourne. I developed my writing style for the picture book format and started trying to find an illustration style while working in a bookshop. Over four years in the bookshop and two as a sales rep for Walker Books, I had access to hundreds of picture books. I was completely resigned to just being a writer when my first manuscript was accepted for publication, but one thing led to another and the original illustrator fell through. I had sent some sketches with the original manuscript and it was decided that I should be given the chance to illustrate it. Turns out it's a lot harder to illustrate a picture book than to write one. I still find the illustration process extremely challenging and I'm still learning. My fastest book was done in a month, my slowest in six months.

**Your bio states that you have two jobs. Can you tell us a bit about the other one?**

I'm afraid that bio is now incorrect. I finished up a full-time second job about 18 months ago and have since been full time working on my books. But that job was fantastic. I was a 'house parent' for 100 indigenous teenagers from communities across the top of Australia who are sent to Darwin to board. I was there for six years, so it was hard to leave having helped so many kids get through school in a strange city. It was NEVER boring and richly rewarding.

**Your passion for working with young people is well-known. What do you think the biggest issues Australian youth are facing today?**

Education – literacy in Australia has fallen to historic lows. In some remote areas, it is at third world levels. By far the biggest challenge the youth of today face is the education system.

There is so much information available at our fingertips now, which is great. But I worry we aren't teaching digital natives how to find the 'right' information. A Google search, for example, has to be one of the best tools ever invented, but it works much better if you have research skills. The chances of coming up with incorrect or spurious information in a library is negligible. That is certainly not the case on the internet.

Online bullying seems very insidious to me. It's hard to avoid a bully who comes into your home digitally and gathers forces against you from a pool of 'friends'. Bullying isn't new, but it's starting to get much nastier.

Having said all of that, I know a heap of kids who are going to be just fine whatever happens.

**As a National Year of Reading Ambassador, you championed literacy in the Northern Territory. What were some of your experiences, and what challenges does the territory still face?**

As above, getting the balance right in schools. Our schools are largely in the hands of bureaucrats in Canberra and literacy is well below the national average. Remote area and Indigenous education is so inconsistent as to be dysfunctional, but mainstream schools are also performing below average. There are some wonderful remote community schools turning

things around with good leadership and a relevant curriculum, but the cookie-cutter system just doesn't work up here.

I was helping 12–18 year old Indigenous kids with their homework for years. Thirteen year olds with the literacy level of seven year olds had homework asking them to circle the superlative adjectives in a paragraph and give alternative names for the upper and lower houses of parliament.

**What can people do to help?**

I think the NT is so far from the major capitals that people don't realize the level of disadvantage that is going on in their own country. All people can do is have some compassion for fellow Australians getting a bad deal.

**If you had the ear of the Australian government for one key message, what would it be?**

Your asylum seeker policy is cruel.

**And, finally, didn't you worry about Sheep getting cold at the end of *The Very Cranky Bear*? Would it have been too much to paint her a shawl?**

Good point!

Thanks so much, Nick, and we look forward to reading *The Wrong Book* on 22 May 2013.

