



Bilby Publishing & Consulting Pty. Ltd.

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Hon Julia Gillard
Minister for Education

c/o : digitaleducationrevolution@deewr.gov.au

Dear Julia

I am writing to you as a result of the governments "Digital Education Revolution". Specifically, from <http://www.digitaleducationrevolution.gov.au/default.htm>, where it is stated that your government is committed to :

- *The development of online curriculum content that will support the national curriculum and conferencing facilities for specialist subjects such as languages.*
- *The development of web portals which will enable parents to participate in their child's education."*

Who Are Bilby Publishing?

Bilby Publishing runs Australia's only Publishing house for Auslan (Australian Sign Language) resources. We have done so for over ten years now. We currently support over 300 schools nationally with the provision of support material for students who need Auslan support in the classroom. We also support over 150 schools who provide Auslan as a LOTE.

We work with and support Disability Services Queensland, Autism Outreach Service, Australian Dyspraxia Support Group, Early Childhood Intervention Services nationally, Charges Syndrome Association, Disability Services Commission, Dept. of Education and Children's Services SA, Education Queensland and the Arts, Department of Education and Training WA, Lifestart Co-operative Ltd, Department of Human Services Vic, VCAA - Languages Department, Disability Studies and Research Institute, NT Department of Education, Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children, NT Dept Health, Disability Resource Unit, Vic. Aboriginal Community Health Org. Inc., DADHC, DEAT NSW, Disability Services Australia, Dept. of Human Services VIC, Dept. Ageing, Disability and Home Care NSW, Specialist Children's Services VIC, Lifeline Co-Operative Ltd. Disability Opportunities Victoria Inc, NT Dept. of Health and Community Services, Qld Dept of Education, Training + the Arts, Tasmanian Dept of Education, Disability Services Commission WA....to name a few.

Why is Auslan important?

Auslan is an important Australian language not only as it is recognized with the nations 'National Language Policy' as a community language, but more importantly as it is a vital means of communication for so many Australians. 21.3% of the population have a disability in one or more categories (survey of neurological, musculoskeletal, sensory and intellectual disabilities of non-institutionalised South Australians). Of these a great many benefit from the use of Auslan. Regrettably many only ever receive access to Auslan in a limited function and experience severe academic disadvantage as a result. I am sure I do not need to draw you

attention to resent court cases that have brought light to such disadvantages experienced by such children with the nations education system.

The fact is that Auslan is used, and proven to be beneficial for children, naturally, who are deaf, but also by those with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Speech Dyspraxia, CHARGES, DOWN Syndrom, as well as many other speech impairing conditions. It is regrettable to have to report that Australia is seeing a dramatic increase in children with such conditions.

“Hearing Loss is already estimated to be the second most prevalent health condition in Australia, with one in every five people over 15 years experiencing some sort of hearing impairment.” “Early detection is the key to ensuring babies and young children access hearing intervention as soon as possible and are not disadvantaged socially and intellectually in the longer term”

The Honorable Julie Bishop, MP

2,013,000 people self-reported having partial or complete deafness in Australia in 2001 (10.8% of total population)(ABS 2001 National Health Survey, Australia’s Health 2004, AIHW) 1,722,879 people self-reported having partial or complete deafness in Australia in 1995 (only 9.6% of population)(Bureau of Statistics study “1995 National Health Survey”) In case you have not already done the maths, we had a 1.2% increase in hearing impaired people in only 5.5years!

What do we want from you?

To date Bilby Publishing has financed the development of Auslan resources independent of any grants or government assistance. However, we feel that the children of Australia can no longer wait for a slow improvement of resources available to them, limited by the personal finances of two Australians (Chris and Lee Bilby).

We wish to discuss with you the development of an extensive bank of resources to support mainstream curriculum in Auslan, as well as enhancing the development of material to support Auslan as a LOTE.

As well as the ‘traditional’ hard copy material we currently supply, we have specialized in the provision of resources through a digital medium. Namely through www.signplanet.net This is an Australian initiative that is unparalleled anywhere else in the world. It has already draw a great deal of attention overseas, as a world leader in the provision of access to sign language resources through an online medium. Again, this site has been solely funded by Bilby Publishing. It provides an online gateway to learning and ‘on the fly’ development of resource material for the classroom, home, workplace etc. The site is extremely popular, generating over 85,000 hits per week. While it includes the largest, currently available bank of printable Auslan images, it’s rate of growth is limited by the amount of time and funds we can afford to put into it.

We would like to see the database triple with support from you. In doing so it would better reflect the language requirements of the primary and secondary curriculum.

We would also like to accelerate the rate of development of the video bank, which is so vitally needed by teachers (and parents) who are struggling to learn Auslan on the fly, to support students who so desperately need them to. Especially within remote and regional areas

where courses are simply not accessible. However, it must be recognized that all teachers with a sign dependant child within their class need to access and learn this language fast if they are to provide the student with equal access to the education provided to their peers. Attending a course is, for the most part, not a practical option for these teachers.

Lastly we would like to see the curriculum support material and functionalities of signplanet.net expanded to better meet the changing needs of the classroom. While there is no doubt that signplanet offers a depth of resources never previously attainable, there is also no doubt that a great deal of time is being exhausted in repetition across the nation. Teachers translating the same text and generating the same material. To elevate this time wasting it is necessary to expand the 'pre-made resources' and resource sharing capabilities of the site, again we look to you for assistance.

The sad reality is that, all too often, the schools that could most benefit from the resources available through the site and other resources can ill afford them. As a result, without doubt, despite the best efforts of teachers, parents and alike, the education of already disadvantaged students it what suffers.

It may alarm you to learn that the average reading age of a sign dependant child exiting the education system is of year 3-4. That is appalling and simply not a situation I can accept, when, with the right support, there is no reason why these children can not meet equal academic results as their peers.

It is with this commitment to equal opportunities for signing children across the nation that we write to you now for your support. We have also attached a letter of support signed by parents, teachers, support workers and concerned Australians, that reflects the high level of support Auslan has within the broader Australian community.

We look forward to your thoughts and commitment.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Lee Bilby', with a stylized flourish underneath.

Lee Bilby

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