

ISS April 2009 Newsletter

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NEWS

Who's Who at ISS Australia

ISS Australia welcomes its new Executive Director. Fionn Skiotis brings to ISS experience in the non-government sector both in Melbourne and internationally. From 2001 he had a number of roles with the Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE), an international Geneva based human rights organization, with periods as coordinator of its Asia Pacific program, and communications officer/documentary filmmaker. Earlier in his career, Fionn worked in a number of roles in the community and supported housing sector. We look forward to Fionn assuming the leadership role with ISS and engaging with staff, key stakeholders and friends of ISS both in Australia and internationally.

Last month ISS Australia (National Office) said good-bye to Claudia Komimbin, our admin volunteer, who left us to take up a full time employment position with Red Cross. Claudia joined us in February 2008 and we were fortunate to have her support and dedication throughout the year. We wish her good luck and success in her future endeavours. Farewell and many thanks, Claudia.

In May 2009 Ellen Mara will be leaving International Social Service. Ellen started with ISS in August 2007. She has been an asset to the ISS Australia team, she will be greatly missed by both offices and she will certainly be very hard to replace. Ellen has made a great contribution to the casework, teamwork and the general running of the NSW office. We wish Ellen safe and happy travels and all the best with her future career. Farewell Ellen!

Promotion of International Social Services' IPCA Program By Helen Freris, IPCA Service Coordinator, National Office

This newsletter has from time to time featured articles relating to ISS' International Parental Child Abduction (IPCA) Program. As well as offering support to individual families, we also believe it is important to let people know about this service, both families and organisations working with them. We have taken a few initiatives to increase our promotion of the IPCA program recently, which I would like to share with readers of this newsletter.

Interstate Seminars

Each year ISS runs seminars for staff of community service and legal organisations who work with separated families, informing them about issues related to international parental child abduction, and how ISS can assist them to better support affected families.

Earlier in April ISS conducted two training seminars in Brisbane aimed at staff working in family law practices and other family support organisations. A total of twenty-five people attended the seminars, representing family law practices, Family Relationship Centres and a neighbourhood learning centre local to Brisbane. Several participants have sent feedback to ISS, describing the seminars as offering valuable information about the impact of international abduction on children, and strategies that workers can give to parents concerned about the abduction of their children. Plans are underway to conduct similar seminars in Perth in June, and a forum on International Child Abduction will take place in Sydney, also in June. ISS will make presentations later this year to managers of all Family Relationship Centres in the Melbourne metropolitan area and to staff of a children's contact centre.

Other Promotional Activities

ISS has recently redeveloped our brochure outlining the IPCA Program, along with the accompanying description of the program on our website. The new brochure will be translated into Arabic, Mandarin and Spanish soon. Staff of the IPCA Program are deeply committed to raising awareness of the service and providing information to the community on issues regarding international parental child abduction. I look forward to sharing further news about IPCA promotions in future issues of this newsletter.

CASE STUDY - Mother and son reunited after 20 years ***By Ellen Mara, Inter Country Social Worker, NSW Office***

ISS Australia and an ISS Unit in Asia worked together to reunite a young adult with his birth mother in Australia. The child had been separated from his birth mother from a young age, and he decided it was now time to reconnect.

Several tracing letters were sent to people in Australia with a similar name, and the Centrelink In Touch Program was also utilised. This Centrelink service allows messages to be passed on to people who may be a Centrelink client.

The birth mother was informed that ISS Australia was trying to locate her and she subsequently contacted ISS to find out more information. ISS met with her and explained that her child was searching for her. During this meeting, the birth mother shared with ISS a diary that she had compiled of her efforts to try to locate her child. It was a very emotional time for the birth mother and support was given around this sudden news.

The ISS Unit in Asia and ISS Australia initially acted in an intermediary role, and shared photos and letters between the child and birth mother. They were finally reunited after nearly 20 years, and shared lots of stories with one another. They have continued to email and call one another. In this case, the searching and reunion happened quickly and a positive outcome was achieved for both parties involved.

All identifying details have been changed to protect the privacy of ISS clients.

ISS CASEWORK - Branch Profile - Germany

By Ms Gabriele Scholz, Director, International Social Service, German Branch

The German Branch of International Social Service has been a member of the ISS international network since 1928. Its office is in Berlin. The staff of ISS German Branch consists of four social workers, three lawyers, and two office workers. All the staff members have lived abroad for some time and speak at least one foreign language (English, French, Spanish, or Russian). Each staff member is in charge of specific countries as well as a specific field of work. The focus of the work of ISS German Branch is on family conflict, child protection, migration, and questions of inter country adoption.

Although the number of Germans migrating overseas is increasing, the geographical focus of the casework is on Europe. In particular, cooperation with Turkey and with Eastern and South Eastern Europe is gaining momentum. ISS German Branch is endeavouring to build close relations with partners from those regions through shared projects.

Apart from casework, ISS German Branch engages in general and consultative work. The staff members have organised specialist conferences for youth welfare offices and courts, with the aim of conveying the basic knowledge and sensitivity required for working on cases with an international dimension. ISS German Branch represents the overall network of ISS in the Council of Europe and, jointly with ISS Switzerland, in the Hague Conference on Private International Law. The German Federal Government, being aware of the vital importance of international social work, supports the work both of ISS German Branch and of the overall network of ISS.

The main emphasis of the work is on the welfare of the child. Therefore, ISS German Branch attaches great importance to its neutrality - it usually does not work upon request of a child's parents, but upon request of youth welfare offices and courts. Only in this way is it possible, in every stage of the procedure, to work towards reaching an amicable solution between the parties involved. Mediation, which has been upgraded considerably as a result of a Directive of the European Union, is regarded by ISS German Branch as an indispensable means of conflict resolution.

But not only children need help - there is also an increasing number of adults who are in need of protection in a foreign country. This is another field where ISS German Branch has a mandate to help - after all, it is the tradition of our organisation to support individuals to cope with the consequences of migration.

CASE STUDY - Long awaited reunion

By Carmel Alakus, Caseworker Coordinator, National Office

Several years ago Barbara approached ISS-AUS to trace her birth mother. The overseas branch that ISS-AUS approached for assistance was successful in locating Barbara's mother. Disappointingly for Barbara her mother politely declined further contact though wished Barbara well. Recently Barbara again made enquiries. Social

Signature:

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carmen.moreira@iss.org.au Thank you.