

ISS February 2009 Newsletter

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NEWS

Farewell to Maria Brett

By Margaret Roberts, President

On 24 February 2009 ISS Australia is to say goodbye to Maria Brett who has resigned from the position of Executive Director in order to return to the UK for personal reasons.

This means that the organisation is now seeking a suitable person to fill the position. There are materials lodged on our website in relation to our current recruitment campaign and external advertisements are in action, with a closing date of 27 February.

Maria commenced with us in September 2006 and has put in two plus really solid years of both consolidation and developmental work for the international network and for us at ISS Australia. We are very sorry to see her go and she will be hard to replace. Levels of service delivery and project work increased and strong working relationships with our major funders and clients all grew during this period. Systems development activities have meant a more streamlined approach to our work and from the governance perspective it has been a pleasure to work with Maria. We all wish her well in her future endeavours and thank her sincerely for her high level contribution to ever increasing professional competencies and level of expertise within our national Branch of the ISS organisation. Farewell and thank you Maria.

New student and volunteers

By Carmen Moreira, Administration Coordinator

We are pleased to welcome Ross Ness from University of New South Wales, who is a social work student on placement at ISS Australia (NSW Office).

ISS Australia (National Office) is also pleased to welcome two new volunteers - Ashleigh Bowditch, a final year Public Relations student from RMIT University and Zoe Wang, a computer programmer originally from Taiwan.

Student experience at ISS Australia

By Cath McPherson, Monash University

As a fourth year social work student at Monash University with limited case work experience, my placement at ISS has been a great experience and invaluable for my learning.

During my placement, I have had the opportunity to take on a small caseload (mainly tracing cases), undertake agency visits and participate in casework practice meetings. I have learnt so much about cross cultural social work, adoption and kinship care, child welfare and how to write reports in a clear and succinct manner! The skills and knowledge I have acquired during my placement have made me feel more capable and confident in my own ability as a beginning social work practitioner, which is especially important as I begin searching for a job.

I have had fantastic supervision and support from all members of staff and feel that my contribution has been valued and appreciated. I would like to thank everyone at ISS for making my time here so rewarding and would recommend ISS to social work students interested in undertaking a cross cultural social work placement.

ISS CASEWORK

Branch Profile - Greece

By Ms Kalli Karra, Social Worker, International Social Service, Hellenic Branch

The Hellenic Branch of ISS was one of the first offices to open in 1924, for the purpose of assisting refugees from Asia Minor and families encountering difficulties caused by migration. It is governed by a Board of Directors elected by the General Assembly of the members of the Branch.

People who benefit from the services of the ISS - Hellenic Branch include Greek migrant families abroad, returning Greek migrants, E.U. citizens in Greece, foreign migrants in Greece, cross - cultural families, asylum seekers and refugee families and any other person who requests assistance on an inter-country level.

There are 3 main fields of activity. Inter-country case work provides assistance to families in maintaining contact across borders, for the purpose of improving relationships and of ensuring the legal rights of the persons involved. Special attention is given to child protection in such cases as: guardianship, custody, abduction by a parent, contact with both parents, visiting rights etc.

The Hellenic Branch is authorized by the Hellenic State to handle inter-country adoption cases. Both pre-marital and marital counseling are also provided to cross-cultural couples. The pre-marital counseling creates awareness regarding legal and social conditions in the countries of the future spouses. Marital counseling covers mediation in conflict situations due to different cultural backgrounds.

The Hellenic Branch of ISS is accredited by the National Accreditation Board as an Accompanying Social Service for the EU. Projects designed to combat social exclusion amongst migrants,

repatriated migrants and refugees. The Branch has implemented E.U. projects on the integration of refugees and participates in European Networks on the exchange of good practices among Member States.

Our main collaborators include the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Departments of Social Welfare of all Prefectures, Social Institutes, Greek Police Departments, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the National Organization for Social Protection, the Greek Red Cross, other Non-Governmental Organizations and also Embassies in Greece.

CHILDREN RIGHTS CORNER

Due to an error this article did not appear in the electronic version of the December newsletter, therefore we are including it again. Apologies to those who have already read it.

The 'best interests' of the child after family breakdown By Helen Freris and Siobhan Kavanagh, IPCA Service, ISS Australia

We often hear about children's 'best interests' in the context of parenting arrangements after family breakdown, but what does this term really mean?

It is likely that children, their parents and any professionals involved will have a different answer, depending on their specific knowledge of the children and their own personal beliefs, needs and values. It is sometimes easy for children's best interests to be lost while parents compete against each other over opportunities to spend time with and make decisions on behalf of children. What do parents and professionals need to keep in mind then, when trying to ensure that children's best interests after a separation are met?

Determining a child's best interests involves considering his/her developmental stage, age, social, emotional and educational needs, culture, language, religion, gender, friendships, abilities, strengths and weaknesses.

The Family Court looks at the best interests of the child to determine shared parental responsibility, and the time children spend with each parent. In the Family Court, 'best interests' firstly refer to the importance of meaningful relationships with each parent, as well as the need to protect children from harm. Other factors, including the child's own views, will also be considered.

Children's rights, as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, are an important part of 'best interests,' particularly Article 9 (the right to a relationship with each parent) and Article 12 (the right to participation in decision making). The reality is that children depend on adults to uphold these rights for them in Family Court proceedings. A careful consideration of a child's situation, characteristics and opinions is a step in the right direction towards upholding children's rights after family breakdown.

There is much to consider when making plans for the best interests of children. Children's direct time with each parent is only one aspect of their lives which usually involve educational, social and family activities. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child offers families and anyone working with them useful reminders of

the many factors which contribute to children's well-being and fulfilment. The more parents are able to consider these factors when planning for children's care after separation, the more likely it is that a decision in the children's best interests will result.

CASE STUDIES

ISS Australia's Information and Advice Service

Thank you to the ISS Australia caseworkers who prepared these short case studies.

This service provides information, advice and referral in brief matters that do not require an inter-country case file to be opened, but still involve the caseworker providing information, advice and support to the client. An advice matter can turn into a case file if the case worker becomes more involved, for example if a referral to another ISS branch/affiliated bureau or correspondent is made.

Never too late

A 59 year old man contacted ISS Australia recently with an enquiry relating to adoption. This man found out at age 58 that he had been adopted as a child. After typing 'adoption' into an internet search engine, he came across ISS Australia. The service request was around support or materials to read for people in the same situation. A referral to an agency running support groups was made as well as an information booklet being sent out. A month after initial contact, a follow up email was sent to the client who informed the caseworker that the referral and information was helping him significantly in adjusting to the new truth in his life.

Preventing abduction

IPCA advice matters are often about preventing an abduction that a client suspects may occur.

For example, a call came through from a woman called Kay who was calling on behalf of her daughter, Sarah. Sarah and her two children had returned to Australia after her marriage ended, however her ex-husband followed her to Australia and threatened that he would take the children. Kay wanted to know what could be done to prevent the children being abducted to another country. The caseworker ran through a checklist to assess the risk of abduction occurring, and to identify which safe guards could be implemented. Kay was relieved to know that there was something she could do to prevent abduction. The caseworker facilitated referrals for Kay and followed up with her on two occasions. The door was left open for the family to contact ISS Australia again if necessary.

Searching for mother after a childhood in care

A man contacted ISS Australia stating he was placed in long term foster care as a child in the 1970s. He was seeking assistance to trace and locate his birth mother. The man had no reason to believe his birth mother was overseas; therefore ISS suggested that he first explore searching for his birth mother in Australia and if he received no success from this he could possibly re-contact us. ISS would however need to know in what country his birth mother is residing. As this man was placed in the care of child protection authorities as a child, ISS suggested he contact the Salvation Army Special Search Service, as they provide a free tracing service for

Expiry:						CVV No:				Last 3 digits on back panel
Signature:										
Please send to: ISS Australia, Level 2, 313-315 Flinders Lane, Melbourne, VIC 3000, Fax to (03) 9614 8766 or e-mail to carmen.moreira@iss.org.au Thank you.										