

ISS October 2008 Newsletter

In this issue you will find:

- ISS Australia Annual General Meeting
 - Funding increase for International Parental Child Abduction (IPCA) Service
 - New IPCA staff recruited
 - 1996 Hague Convention - Research Project
 - Child Rights Corner - The needs of the child when families are in conflict
 - Case Study - A successful family reunion
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NEWS

ISS Australia Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting of ISS Australia will take place on 30/10/08. It has been a long time between AGMs - 18 months in fact - due to a change in our financial year. We used to follow the practice of ISS internationally of operating a calendar financial year but this had become problematic as it did not align with our funding arrangements. We sought and received approval to change to a July to June financial year, with a transitional financial year of 18 months. This change has been a major achievement and now that the transition is complete, we look forward to improved efficiencies in our finance and reporting systems.

Funding increase for International Parental Child Abduction (IPCA) Service

In the current financial year ISS Australia received a substantial increase in funding from the federal Attorney-General's Department for the IPCA Service. This enabled an increase in staffing for the IPCA Service and expansion of the Service to include mediation of IPCA cases. The funding increase is the result of continuing growth in referrals to the IPCA Service and illustrates how valuable the Service is for supporting families affected by abduction and in some cases, actually preventing abductions.

New IPCA staff recruited

ISS Australia was sad to lose both Sandra De Silva and Sally Szmerning who did excellent work for the IPCA Service during their time with ISS. Thank you to Sandra and Sally for their contribution. We welcome Helen Freris and Siobhan Kavanagh, our new IPCA staff.

Introducing Helen Freris, IPCA Service Coordinator

My name is Helen Freris and I have been recently appointed to the role of IPCA Service Coordinator at ISS Australia. This role will provide a wonderful opportunity to advocate for the needs of children in the context of family breakdown and geographical distance between parents.

My professional background as a social worker has involved telephone counselling in the areas of parental support and suicide prevention, disability advocacy and most recently, working for Victoria Legal Aid's family dispute resolution service. I look forward to further developing the IPCA service and consolidating my interests in advocating for the rights of children, dispute resolution and the international context of social work.

Introducing Siobhan Kavanagh, IPCA Caseworker

My name is Siobhan Kavanagh and I'm the new IPCA Caseworker at ISS Australia. I graduated with a Bachelor of Social Work in 2006 after completing professional placements at a drug and alcohol clinic and a Migrant Resource Centre. I then worked as a settlement support worker at the Migrant Resource Centre, in a casework and community development role with newly arrived African communities.

I was first introduced to ISS Australia when I attended their training on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. I was so impressed that I kept my eye out for ISS job vacancies! I'm very happy to now be a part of the ISS team and I'm hoping that my experience and interest in cross cultural social work will be of value to the important work of ISS Australia.

1996 Hague Convention - Research Project

On 30 September ISS Australia published a Research Report on the 1996 Hague Convention on Parental Responsibility and Child Protection. The Report is part of a project funded by the Ian Potter Foundation, "Boosting Outcomes for Australian Children Using International Laws" and will be available soon at the ISS Australia website, www.iss.org.au.

The 1996 Hague Convention is a multi-lateral treaty developed by the Hague Conference on Private International Law to improve the protection of children in international situations. It does this by building a structure for effective international co-operation in child protection matters. The Convention also determines which country's authorities have jurisdiction to take measures to protect children across international borders, clarifies which are the applicable laws, and enables recognition and enforcement of protection measures in Contracting States.

Currently only 15 countries, including Australia, have ratified the Convention and to date there have been no Australian cases under the Convention. However, once more countries ratify the Convention, it is expected the Convention will start operating, with significant changes in the way international cases involving

children are dealt with.

The project has enabled ISS Australia to deepen its own understanding of the 1996 Hague Convention, positioning us as the leading non-government organisation in Australia with expertise on the Convention. We have also developed more effective service delivery systems for responding to inter-country cases involving children and have identified key aspects of the Convention that could be applied to improve outcomes for children.

The Research Report sets out ISS Australia's achievements during the project including:

- Our research findings on the application of the 1996 Hague Convention in the inter-country casework of ISS Australia;
- Development of a new database for data collection and research purposes; and
- Development of a new service delivery model to support implementation of the Convention in cross-border cases involving child protection or parental responsibility.

Key recommendations emerging from this report include:

- Building collaborative relationships between ISS Australia and the Central Authorities in relation to cross-border cases involving child protection or parental responsibility;
- The need for a new ISS Australia program to be funded by the Federal Government for affected families and children; and
- As part of the new program, a range of training activities aimed at building knowledge of the Convention and how to apply it to improve outcomes for children.

Stage two of the project, which has also been funded by the Ian Potter Foundation, will involve promoting the services ISS Australia can offer nationally in relation to the 1996 Convention. In this way we hope to progress some - if not all - of the recommendations in the Report and to be able to measure the impact on outcomes for children.

CHILD RIGHTS CORNER

The needs of the child when families are in conflict

By Damon Martin, NSW Service Co-ordinator

When parents separate, their continuing conflict can have damaging consequences for the children. Children should not be exposed to hostility or violence between their parents. It is important for the parents not to drag children into their quarrels or expect them to take sides. Separation can be an extremely stressful time for parents and they need to seek emotional support from family, friends and professionals. Children don't need to be burdened with their parents' worries - they have enough worries of their own adjusting to the new living situation.

As a parent may be feeling bitter and hurt from the separation, it

may be difficult to consider the children's needs. It is important for the parent not to say negative things to a child about the other parent. The parent may not like the other parent any more, but he or she is still the child's parent. It can be very confusing for children to hear their parents criticise each other, making them unsure if they are still allowed to love the other parent. Parents should allow the child to retain his or her positive feelings for the other parent and to talk freely about that parent at any time. A child should not have to edit his or her speech for a parent's benefit.

Financial issues when separation occurs can cause huge conflict between parents, and it is important that children are not brought into these arguments. Children have a right to see the other parent regardless of how much that parent is paying towards their care. Parents should avoid trying to get the child on their 'side' by comments such as 'we could buy you new trainers if your father paid me for your maintenance' or 'I don't see why he should be allowed to see you this weekend - if he cared about you he would send enough money'.

When International Social Service works with families in conflict, the needs of the children are paramount. Focusing parents on the needs of their children can significantly contribute to better outcomes, not only for the children but for the whole family.

CASE STUDY

A successful family reunion

By Feray Ergun, Inter-Country Casework, ISS Australia

ISS Australia and an ISS Unit in South East Asia have worked very closely and successfully in reuniting Robert, a 4 year old boy, with his family overseas. Robert came to the attention of ISS Australia following a referral from the relevant Child Protection Department. Robert had been placed in foster care when it was discovered that his mother was abusing prohibited drugs. Prior to Robert's birth, Robert's father had been deported to his country of origin. To ensure Robert didn't drift in care, the Department was considering options for kinship care.

The Department requested an assessment of Robert's paternal grandparents and father who were living overseas. Robert's paternal grandparents had offered to be the primary carers for Robert, should he be returned "home". Along with an assessment of the paternal grandparents as potential carers, Robert's father was also tested to determine whether he was drug free and the drug tests were clear. The assessment conducted by ISS Australia's counterpart overseas strongly recommended Robert's paternal grandparents as carers for Robert.

Meetings between the Department, ISS Australia, other child welfare services, Robert's foster carers and his paternal grandmother took place to arrange the required paperwork for

Robert's travel to South-East Asia. Once the paperwork was arranged, Robert was accompanied by his grandmother to be reunited with his family overseas.

The great working relationship between the two ISS units ensured that the family was supported during the transition to Robert's new living arrangements. It has since been discovered that the relationship and bond between Robert and his paternal grandparents and, in particular, with his father is now very strong.

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

Contributions and Feedback Welcome

The ISS newsletter is produced every two months. If you would like to contribute to the newsletter, either by writing an article or a letter to the editor, please contact Maria Brett at maria@iss.org.au.

We always appreciate your feedback. To respond to articles or give us feedback, please e-mail the editor.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION / RENEWAL FORM 2008-09

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