

ISS October 2009 Newsletter

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NEWS

1. ISS Australia: Towards 50 years of International Social Services in Australia

Fionn Skiotis, Executive Director, ISS Australia

International Social Service Australia (to use the new name that will be put to members at the company's Annual General Meeting on 27 October 2009) was established in Australia as the local arm of the international ISS network in 1961. 2011 therefore represents the important milestone of 50 years of ISS Australia providing international social work services in this country. ISS Australia recently completed a strategic planning process for the three-year period 2009-2011, with the Board of Directors (ISS Australia's governance body, formerly known as the Council of Management) approving a final plan entitled "Consolidation with Development: Towards 50 years of ISS in Australia".

The plan recognises the need for ISS Australia to both consolidate its existing services and activities, of which it can be proud, while at the same time extending the scope and range of these services and actively seeking out opportunities for new services and business. It identifies five key strategic objectives, including achieving financial viability, building organisation capacity, and extending our casework services into new areas including research, policy development and training. We will need to market and network our services more effectively, while at the same time continuing to contribute to the international ISS network. I know the ISS staff team look forward to the challenge of achieving the plan's broad strategic objectives through their activities and work.

The year ahead will undoubtedly be a busy and interesting one for ISS Australia, with a new company name and logo, a revamped website (to be launched in the first half of 2010) and a new-look quarterly newsletter to be introduced soon. With our new Business Development Manager on board (see item below introducing Jessica Redwood) ISS Australia will be investing considerable time and resources into marketing our services, identifying and following up opportunities for new services that are appropriate to our mission, and boosting our fundraising activities to secure our financial future. We hope to keep in regular touch with members, partners and supporters generally reporting on developments and challenges as the next year unfolds, and welcome any feedback you might have for us at: iss@iss.org.au.

2. Presentation of ISS Australia Paper at an International Conference

Helen Freris, IPCA Service Coordinator, ISS Australia

Thanks to the kind donation of Joanna Baevski, a niece of ISS Australia's generous supporter and co-founder, Neilma Gantner, and a generous philanthropist in her own right, I was privileged to be able to attend an international conference in Prato, Italy from September 7-10 2009. The conference, entitled "Children and the Law: International Approaches to Children and Their Vulnerabilities", was hosted by Monash University at their campus in Prato, Italy, and brought together leading researchers in the fields of legal and social work research, policy and practice on behalf of children. Several themes were covered in the conference: children and family law, juvenile justice, child protection, children and international disasters and child rights. The paper I presented for ISS Australia was entitled "Hague Children's conventions: The Need for An Advocacy Response to Protect Children in the Context of International Parental Child Abduction", and discussed the dilemmas involved in supporting children and parents required to return to their habitual residence under the 1980 Hague Convention. The paper described the specific problems faced by some children and parents who are ineligible for social security and other community services in the countries to which they are ordered to return, and the resulting implications on the welfare of children. ISS's presentation was well-received, and the work of ISS in the service delivery areas of international parental child abduction and child rights advocacy was encouraged. The paper can be downloaded from ISS Australia's website at: www.iss.org.au.

The conference offered an opportunity to hear about some of the latest research in areas of social work and legal practice with children. Some notable highlights were:

- Research findings which suggested that more work was needed to ensure the safety of children experiencing the dual impact of family violence and parental separation;
- Studies which suggested the importance of actively

seeking and hearing children's views relating to post-separation living arrangements;

- Presentations describing the problem of international trafficking and exploitation of children, and calling for solutions promoting social and political structures which address poverty and gender inequality;
- Evidence suggests that child protection needs to become a whole-of-community responsibility, with program and policies needed to actively support all community members to recognise children's rights and need for protection and to work towards building safe home and neighbourhood environments;
- Developments in various countries in family law suggest that the determination of children's best interests after separation is difficult, and needs to be based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child as well as on the emotional, socio-economic, cultural and spiritual circumstances of each family unit.

International conferences present a wonderful opportunity for networking, and this conference was no exception. The conference was attended by researchers from various Australian schools of social work and law, family lawyers and magistrates from Australia, South Africa and the United Kingdom, human service practitioners from children's and family services throughout Australia, as well as leading American and Canadian researchers in the fields of child psychiatry and child protection. I was proud to introduce conference participants to the work and mission of ISS Australia and to make contacts which will potentially enhance ISS's future work with children and families. Needless to say, the wonderful food and coffee provided by our Italian hosts at Monash University's Prato centre kept everyone energised and alert. I wish to extend my sincere thanks to Joanna Baeviski, whose financial support has allowed the work of ISS Australia to be profiled at this international event, and contributed to ISS Australia's networks with colleagues in the social work and legal sector nationally and internationally.

3. Introducing Jessica Redwood, Business Development Manager

I have recently started at ISS Australia's National Office in Melbourne, in the newly created Business Development Manager role. The funding for this role has been made available by the Myer Foundation's 'Celebrating our Partners' programme.

I have spent the majority of my career working throughout the Asia-Pacific region. This has included advising international organisations such as Amnesty International and Save the Children as well as several local organisations. In addition, I managed a network of non-government organisations in rural New South Wales. Over the last three years, I was a Program Support Manager for Marie Stopes International Australia where I started and oversaw their East Timor and Papua New Guinea branches. I am now, however, very excited about being involved

in the important work of ISS and hope to make a valuable contribution to the organisation!

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has welcomed me so warmly!

4. ISS CASEWORK - Correspondent Profile - Affiliated Bureau Profile - ISS New Zealand

Cathy Woods, ISS New Zealand

ISS New Zealand is a member of ISS as an Affiliated Bureau, located within Child Youth and Family Services (CYF), a service of the Ministry of Social Development (MSD). CYF is a nationwide statutory organisation responsible for care and protection, youth justice and both local and inter-country adoption services with all families in New Zealand. ISS New Zealand as part of CYF has been a corresponding member of ISS since 1952 and became an Affiliated Bureau of ISS in 1994. The Contract of Affiliation to ISS was made between CYF and ISS in 1996 (1). Membership and operating costs incurred by the ISS NZ Affiliated Bureau are met out of the general operating costs of MSD. MSD also makes contributions to the International Reference Centre.

The Director of ISS New Zealand is Lorraine Williams. She is the General Manager of Operations in CYF. Most of the Director's functions are delegated to Paula Attrill, Director, Adoptions and International Services team. All ISS referrals come through this team. The team is located in New Zealand's capital city, Wellington, in the National Office of MSD. Cathy Woods is the Casework Supervisor. Both Paula and Cathy are trained social workers. They are assisted by other members of the team who are also social workers with extensive experience. ISS casework forms only a part of the team's work. The same team is the operational arm of the New Zealand Central Authority under the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption. In addition, the team incorporates the role of the International Liaison Officer (ILO) Boris Fejzagic. The ILO undertakes casework that arises from a statutory protocol MSD in NZ has with the Australian States and Territories in regard to child care and protection matters. Because the team has a variety of international responsibilities, it enables a close association between international casework that involves both ISS and non-ISS matters.

ISS NZ as an Affiliated Bureau can provide only those services that CYF can provide. However, subject to work demands, ISS NZ has access to trained CYF social workers across the whole country.

The main activity of ISS NZ is casework. ISS NZ does not undertake 'local' cases. ISS New Zealand handles a relatively small number of cases, averaging about 20-30 per year. Case work is predominately in three areas: searching and reunion on behalf of adult adopted persons and birth parents, intercountry adoption casework, primarily for proposals to adopt relatives from other countries, and care and protection of children

requests (child welfare).

New Zealand has been a leader in opening records from the closed adoptions of the past, and the ISS network is invaluable in tracing and facilitating contact, with positive outcomes to the benefit of all parties. ISS NZ casework practice in regard to post adoption reflects local practice, featuring a client self-determination model. There is free and frequent movement of New Zealanders to and from Australia, therefore many of the cases are between ISS NZ and ISS Australia; however cases can involve up to three or four ISS units demonstrating the unique benefits the ISS network offers.

Child welfare casework is often complex and urgency is often a feature of referrals, both inward and outward, as the wellbeing of young children is at stake. In accordance with local legislation, the primary considerations are the best interests of the child and family decision-making.

ISS NZ has cases with a variety of ISS units, primarily in the Asia-Pacific region, followed by others such as the UK, Canada, and South Africa. This reflects both historic and current migration trends.

(1) (An Affiliated Bureau is a body linked to ISS by a special agreement, which may or may not cover the entire activity of the associated body.)

CHILD RIGHTS CORNER

5. Children's Rights and the Global Financial Crisis

Sally Szmerling, Inter-country Caseworker, ISS Australia

15 September marked the first anniversary of US banking giant Lehman Brothers filing for bankruptcy, sparking the global financial crisis. As a stark reminder of the wide-reaching impact of globalisation, the collapse of the US subprime market continues to have devastating effects upon children all over the world. Unfortunately, the effects of the financial crisis upon children are often overlooked as media coverage of plummeting share values and corporate collapses focuses on the impacts upon adults.

As a result of the crisis a number of rights enshrined in the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child are being compromised, including: Article 27 - right to an adequate standard of living including nourishment and shelter; Article 24 - right to healthcare; Article 28 - right to education; Article 32 - protection from labour exploitation; and Article 35 - protection from trafficking.

Drastically inflated food prices resulting from the financial crisis have put the provision of basic nutritional requirements out of reach for many families. As the poverty of children increases with the economic downturn they become more vulnerable to trafficking, forced labour and forced conscription to militia groups as child soldiers. Children of poor families may be

removed from school and sent to work or even sold as families struggle to provide for their basic necessities. The crisis is also having detrimental effects upon child health; UNICEF estimates that child mortality of under-five year olds in East Asia could increase by 3-11%.

Children have an unequivocal right to food, healthcare and welfare protection. This should not be compromised by a financial crisis that children did not create. Governments should view this financial crisis as an opportunity to invest in quality social services. Doing so is in the best interests of children and also the best interest of the economy because strong children grow up to contribute to a strong workforce. Fundamentally, investment in the rights of children is an investment for a better future and constitutes sound economic policy.

CASE STUDY

6. Tara Harvey, Inter-country Social Worker, ISS Australia - NSW Office

Marina's son, 12 years old, was living in foster care in the UK. Marina contacted ISS Australia for assistance in having her son returned to her care.

Marina's son was removed a year ago, due to neglect and domestic violence in the family home. A few months after her son was removed from her care, Marina moved to Australia to re-establish her life.

Once she was settled she contacted the UK authorities and said she would now like her son to be restored to her care. They informed her that she would need to have an assessment completed on her current living circumstances and parental capacity.

ISS Australia, by referral from the UK authorities and in liaison with Marina, completed the assessment over two visits. It was recommended that Marina's son be returned to her care. Marina and her son were reunited a few months later. Her son is now very settled at home with his mother and step family and is enjoying school.

Note: *All identifying information has been changed to protect the privacy of those involved.*

Contributions and Feedback Welcome

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

We always appreciate your feedback.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION / RENEWAL FORM 2009-10

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