



## **ISS AUSTRALIA NEWSLETTER**

### **– January 2011**

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#### **ISS News**

##### **1. Developments at ISS Australia – in brief**

###### ***Farewell to Margaret Roberts***

Margaret Roberts, who served as a member of ISS Australia's Board for nine years from 2001, and was Branch President for five years, retired as a Director at the 2010 Annual General Meeting. Margaret's contribution to ISS Australia, and to the international ISS network, was significant. Her achievements including progressing the development and eventual adoption of new, modern Statutes for the international network, work that posed substantial challenges but was ultimately capped with success! Margaret's experience, insight and verve will be greatly missed by all of us at ISS Australia, although Margaret remains a member and will we hope continue to visit the office as a volunteer.

###### ***ISS Australia's 50th anniversary***

ISS Australia was incorporated as a company limited by guarantee (that is, a not-for-profit company) under Australian law on 8 March 1961 (although ISS had been operating in Australia as an unincorporated Committee for some years prior to 1961). We're looking forward to celebrating our 50th anniversary in

March 2011, with a reception at Government House in Melbourne hosted by the Governor Professor David de Kretser AC and his wife.

Other events are also being planned for 2011, our "50th birthday" year.

###### ***2010 AGM***

ISS Australia held its 2010 Annual General Meeting on 26 October 2010, at the Melbourne offices of HLB Mann Judd (where our Treasurer, Chris Simpson, is a partner). The meeting was a relatively straightforward affair, with Margaret Roberts thanked and farewelled as a Board member after nine years (five as President), and those Directors standing down under the terms of ISS Australia's Constitution all re-elected. Subsequent to the AGM, Mr Vedran Drakulic (General Manager, Public Affairs with the RACV) was appointed to a casual vacancy on the Board.

###### ***ISS Australia now in Queensland***

ISS Australia has since August 2010 had a small but very useful presence in Queensland,



extending our reach beyond the existing National and NSW Offices. Rosie Thomas, our Intercountry Social Worker previously based in Sydney, is now located in the Brisbane office of a partner agency, Post Adoption Support Queensland operated by The Benevolent Society. This development is on a trial basis until funding to support our presence in Queensland can be secured. We congratulate Rosie on her brave move north and wish her every success in Brisbane.

### **New printed materials for ISS Australia**

As part of a larger service marketing strategy, ISS Australia recently overhauled its printed materials. Our new suite of materials includes brochures on ISS Australia generally



and on our five main service areas, a "testimonial" slip and an A3 poster aimed particularly at services referring clients to ISS Australia. Following delivery the National Office distributed some 1,200 sets of these new materials to family and child-related services across Australia. If you would like a set of our brochures - or are

interested in a particular service we provide - please let us know on 1300 657 843 or email [iss@iss.org.au](mailto:iss@iss.org.au). We'll be happy to send you the requested material by return post.

### **Integrated service delivery model introduced**

In the second half of 2010, ISS Australia reviewed and adapted its internal structure, replacing two distinct services in the National Office with a single, integrated service providing the full range of international social work services. Helen Freris will now oversee the delivery of casework services in the National Office in the new position of National Services Manager. We emphasise that ISS Australia continues to provide all of its services, particularly its Australia-wide International Parental Child Abduction service funded by the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department, without any reduction in service resources or standards.

### **"In the Best Interests of the Child" project**

ISS Australia has received funding from the Ian Potter Foundation for a project entitled "In the Best Interests of the Child". The project will research and develop training materials on international child rights and child protection standards, for potential delivery to Australian audiences working with children but without strong knowledge of international child rights and other norms. Project Officer Catherine Caruana, a lawyer with a background in human rights and family law, will develop a suite of materials in consultation with a training specialist. We will provide more details on the project in a forthcoming edition of this newsletter.



*ISS Australia gratefully acknowledges the support of the Ian Potter Foundation for this project.*

### **CROC NGO shadow reporting process**

ISS Australia is a member of the Australian Child Rights Taskforce, which brings together a wide range of organisations and services with a common interest in protecting and strengthening the human rights of children. The Taskforce is coordinating development of an alternative or "shadow" report on Australia's progress in implementing its obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CROC). Under the terms of the Convention, ratifying countries must report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child at regular intervals, and a feature of the process is the capacity for civil society groups to provide an alternative report alongside the official report submitted by the Australian Government. For more information visit the Taskforce's website at: <http://www.childrights.org.au/>.

### **Thanks to our Social Work students**

ISS Australia has accepted Australian and international social work students on placement in both our National and NSW Offices for many years. In the second half of 2010 ISS Australia was very pleased to host students Tiana Boyd (Victoria University) and Yan Mar (RMIT) in the National Office and Natalie Muller (University of Agder, Norway) in the NSW Office. We're pleased to report Tiana graduated as a social worker towards the end of 2010, and even more pleased that she is now a regular volunteer with our casework service! ISS Australia thanks its committed social work students and congratulates them on their achievements.

Fionn Skiotis  
Executive Director



## 2. Network member profile: International Social Service in Ireland

Ireland has had an ISS Correspondent since the early 1970s. Since July 2002 the Health Service Executive (HSE) undertook responsibility for the day to day administration of ISS. Ms Ita O'Brien, Specialist for Children & Family Services, agreed to add the role of ISS Correspondent to her existing functions. Ms O'Brien recently retired and Mr Gildas Gordon is the interim Correspondent for the time being. Ms Evelien Dennekamp handles administration.

Prior to 2000 there were few cases for ISS in Ireland. The economic boom experienced by Ireland in the late 1990s saw a huge influx of economic migrants from all over the globe and also made Ireland a destination for asylum seekers. In 2002 when the HSE took over the ISS role there were 28 cases in total for the year. In 2010 (up to 13 December) ISS Ireland had dealt with 103 cases.

ISS Ireland does not deal directly with clients; in general requests for assistance coming from ISS network members overseas are dealt with by the HSE's Social Workers. Requests for services from Irish Social Workers are transmitted to the appropriate

ISS Branch, Affiliated Bureau or Correspondent in the country concerned.

The majority of cases passing through the Irish office can be summarised as follows:

- Home study reports and follow-up in child protection / welfare cases
- Tracing birth parents and information in relation to adoptions
- Minor Asylum Seekers, i.e. tracing their families and country of origin
- Preparation of social work assessments for custody and access cases
- Background checks for non-nationals known to the Social Services in Ireland
- Request for Social Services Clearance for overseas adoption

In 2010 we had 14 cases with ISS Australia. Most of those are requests for a Social Service Clearance for potential Irish adopters. We also have a few tracing requests and requests from Irish Social Workers to inform their Australian counterparts about concerns in relation to children who have moved to Australia. There is a very good relationship between ISS Australia and the Irish ISS Correspondent.

## 3. Australia and Lebanon's bilateral Agreement to Tackle Child Abduction

Parents whose children have been abducted between Australia and Lebanon can now use a new procedure to assist in negotiating their children's return. After several years of negotiations between government authorities in both countries, the Agreement between Australia and the Republic of Lebanon Regarding Cooperation on Protecting the Welfare of Children officially came into force in June 2010. As Lebanon is not a signatory to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Parental Child Abduction, the Agreement provides a welcome mechanism for the two nations' foreign ministries, and the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department and its equivalent in Lebanon, to negotiate the resolution of cases involving child abduction or child contact between the two countries.

The Agreement works in the same way as Australia's similar bilateral agreement with Egypt, in operation since 2000. Both agreements make provision for cases of international parental child abduction or contact to be negotiated by a Joint

Consultative Committee comprising Foreign Affairs and Justice Department representatives from both countries who attempt to seek solutions to the cases brought before them. Unlike procedures under the 1980 Hague Convention, matters are resolved outside the courts of either country, unless parents engage in court proceedings independently.

The Agreement provides for the resolution of both new and pre-existing cases between Australia and Lebanon, and parents wishing to use the agreement are required to complete a simple application form, available from the Attorney-General's Department. Parents in Australia can contact the Department's International Family Law Section on 1800 100 480 for more information.

Copies of the bilateral Agreement are available in English and Arabic on the Department's website:

[www.ag.gov.au/www/agd/agd.nsf/Page/Families\\_Children\\_Bilateralagreementsoninternationalchildabduction](http://www.ag.gov.au/www/agd/agd.nsf/Page/Families_Children_Bilateralagreementsoninternationalchildabduction)

#### 4. Singapore preparing to sign 1980 Hague Convention

In preparation for signing the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Parental Child Abduction, a delegation from Singapore recently travelled to Australia to gain insights about the Convention's implementation in Australia. The delegation included staff from Singapore's Central Authority, the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports. Delegation members attended ISS Australia's National Office in July 2010 in order to learn more about our International Parental Child Abduction Service and its implementation.

This visit enhanced ISS Australia's relationships with colleagues in our region and other social work stakeholders in Singapore. The photograph below was taken during the visit.



#### 5. Case Study: International Parental Child Abduction to a non-Hague signatory

Lara contacted ISS Australia after her six month old daughter, Anna, was taken to Vietnam by the child's father, John. Lara reported that John had then returned to Australia without Anna, leaving Anna in the care of her paternal grandparents.

Vietnam is not a signatory to the 1980 Hague Convention on International Parental Child Abduction and as a result, Lara was unable to utilise legal processes set out in the Convention for Anna's return to Australia.

However, as both parents were living in Australia, ISS Australia supported Lara in accessing appropriate legal advice and as a result, action was initiated in the Family Court in Australia. The Court placed significant and

ongoing pressure on John to make arrangements for Anna's return to Australia.

ISS Australia supported Lara through this process by providing emotional support and completing referrals to relevant support services.

After approximately five months, John and his parents arranged Anna's to return to Australia.

Short term contact arrangements were made in the Family Court of Australia and Lara continues to have contact with Anna. In addition, Lara and John are now in the process of arranging appropriate custody arrangements for Anna.

#### 6. Universal Children's Day

Universal Children's Day takes place each year on 20 November. First proclaimed by the UN General Assembly in 1954, it was created to promote worldwide togetherness, fellowship and understanding between children. In addition to this it has been utilised as an opportunity to initiate action for the promotion and advancement of the welfare of children all around the world. UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund, promotes and coordinates this special day. Many countries, including Canada, New Zealand and the UK, hold Universal Children's Day events on 20 November; other countries hold events on different dates, such as Australia which observes it on the fourth Wednesday in October in conjunction with Children's Week. Universal Children's Day is recognised as a

day for everyone to celebrate childhood, although technically it is declared a holiday only for children. As such parents and carers around the world are encouraged to dedicate the day to their children by spending time with them and participating in activities chosen by the child.

Further contributing to this already special event is the significance of its date. 20 November is also the anniversary of the adoption of the United Nations General Declaration of the Rights of the Child in 1959. The Convention on the Rights of the Child was then signed on the same day in 1989, and has since been ratified by 194 countries. As a universally agreed set of non-negotiable standards, the Convention is an important tool used by International Social Service and many

others around the world. It outlines the civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights of children and provides guidance for the advocacy and protection of children.

Recognising the value of Universal Children's Day and allowing children to participate in celebrations and activities is not just a worthy attitude, but also an important show of support for the development of children's rights. As International Social Service

## 7. Kinship care research project

With funding from the R.E Ross Trust, ISS Australia is currently undertaking a small scale qualitative research project to begin looking at what factors contribute to a successful international kinship care placement.



International kinship care involves placing children in foster (or out-of-home) care in one country with family members (kin)

in another. Facilitating kinship care across

## 8. International Meetings 1: Professional Advisory Committee (PAC) Meeting

The ISS network's revised Statutes (passed by a decisive – 51 to 0 – vote in favour at an Extraordinary International Council meeting in May 2010, as reported in our September 2010 newsletter) provide for a Professional Advisory Committee or PAC, made up of all of the Executive Directors (or equivalents) of ISS's Branches and Affiliated Bureaus. The primary role of the PAC is to provide ISS's 7 member Governing Board with "expert social work knowledge and advice", working in close cooperation with the General Secretariat. The PAC Chair (Julie Rosicky – Director, ISS USA) sits on the Governing Board as a consequence of holding that office.

PAC members held a meeting via conference call on 7 October 2010. This was in many ways the first proper meeting of this body, as the inaugural meeting in May (which elected a

## 9. International Meetings 2: Supervisors' Seminar in Berlin

Damon Martin (ISS Australia's Manager, NSW Office) attended the annual ISS Supervisors' Seminar in Berlin, Germany from 27– 29 September 2010. It was attended by

implements its world-wide commitment to ensure the protection of children, we encourage you to remember all children deserve access to the unequivocal rights laid out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and to celebrate on Universal Children's Day.

international borders is a significant part of ISS Australia's work, however there is little documented research on best practice and outcomes in this area.

The research will involve kinship carers, children, and relevant agencies in Australia and overseas, and it is hoped the project may lead to further studies of this important issue.

*ISS Australia would like to thank the R.E. Ross Trust for their ongoing support of our work and their generous funding of this project.*

Chair) was held immediately after ratification of the new Statutes and thus did not allow the preparation of proposals and other materials. The inaugural meeting did establish three Working Groups, focusing on network development, the PAC's own procedures and international social work respectively. ISS Australia's Executive Director Fionn Skiotis was appointed Chair of the Network Development Working Group and presented a position paper developed by the group to the PAC meeting. Following a lively discussion, the agreed elements of this paper were in turn presented to the Governing Board by the PAC Chair. The PAC is scheduled to meet next on 8 February 2011, and will hold its annual face-to-face meeting in Geneva in May.



21 participants from 16 nations, chiefly European countries as well as Hong Kong, Canada, USA and Australia. This was the first time since 2005 that a representative of ISS

Australia had attended the ISS Supervisors' Seminar, and this year's meeting also included ISS Correspondents for the very first time.

ISS Germany hosted a highly professional and productive seminar aimed at strengthening and developing the ISS global network as well as addressing pertinent casework issues within our network. On the final day of the seminar the supervisors had the opportunity to provide a summary of discussions and recommendations directly to the ISS Secretary General, Jean Ayoub. The

### 10. Quarterly Prize Draw

ISS Australia appreciates contributions from all its members. Their valuable support enables us to continue defending children and connecting families across the world! In appreciation and thanks for this support, in 2011 we have started a **quarterly prize draw**. This quarter's lucky winner is *Professor Jan Carter!*

Thank you for your ongoing interest, commitment and support Jan! Your prize is currently being posted to you.

five main topics discussed during the seminar were network development, a possible fee system for network members, declining and emerging issues, kinship assessments and using a mediation-based approach. The seminar was also a perfect opportunity for supervisors to establish stronger links with one another and in some cases finally meet one another in person. The next ISS Supervisors' Seminar will be hosted by ISS Serbia in Belgrade in 2011- this will be the first time such a meeting has been hosted by an ISS Correspondent!

### Would you like to become a member?

Members receive this quarterly newsletter, go into a quarterly prize draw, have the right to vote at ISS Australia's AGM and stand for election to the Board, and have input into the organisation's future directions.



Call ISS Australia today on 1300 657 843!

### International Social Service Australia...

International Social Service Australia is an independent charity and as such relies on donations to ensure critical services **defending children, and connecting families across the world** continues. If you would like to find out more or donate please call us today!

Level 2, 313-315 Flinders Lane, Melbourne, VIC 3000.  
P: **1300 657 843**, P: 03 9614 8755. F: 03 9614 8766. ABN: 12 004 508 641.  
E: [iss@iss.org.au](mailto:iss@iss.org.au). [www.iss.org.au](http://www.iss.org.au).