

# The child welfare system in Victoria

## Changing context and perspectives 1945-1995

Anne Markiewicz

*This paper traces the history of child welfare in Victoria, from the formation of the Children's Welfare Department to the present time. It draws principally upon the Annual Reports of the responsible state government department, to illustrate trends in out-of-home placement for children and young people admitted to care. It describes substantial shifts in direction to the institutions in the 1960s, deinstitutionalisation of the 1980s, and the re-emergence of home-based care as a favoured, economical option.*

*The paper traces the ebbs and flows in numbers, periods of overcrowding and the current reduced number of children and young people in care. It notes events impacting on evolving child welfare history in Victoria, the child migration program, building projects, the establishment of family group homes, regionalisation, external review, the Children and Young Persons Act (1989), and mandatory reporting legislation. Themes emerging include: early child welfare as a period of rescue and reform; the monitoring of standards and re-entry of the department to residential care; the*

*building of institutions and rising numbers in care; redevelopment and the emergence of a community focus; the expansion of child protection; and the phasing out of old models and the search for cost efficient alternatives.*

*A challenge for the 1990s is the need for deliberate and planned monitoring and evaluation as institutional and residential care give way to home-based care, and numbers of admissions decrease. The paper aims to provide useful, historical material for readers with an interest in child welfare work which would benefit from a descriptive review of the past.*

Child welfare history in Victoria has seen great shifts in ideology and values, as different models of service provision have developed and then been dismantled, and children in care placed in a range of settings, or actively encouraged to return home to their families. The history of child welfare in Victoria is rich with lessons to be learned, and it is the aim of this article to provide some of the historical material with which this retrospective reflection can occur, hopefully paving the way for forward thinking and planning. In compiling the material for this article I was personally struck with nostalgia, much of it negative such as the overcrowding of Allambie, and the plight of disabled and emotionally damaged children in the system, but some of it positive such as the dedication of staff despite enormous odds, the enthusiasm of building projects aimed at providing better accommodation for state wards, and the efforts to introduce better methods, such as case planning involving families.

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*Anne Markiewicz is a lecturer in the School of Social Work at The University of Melbourne. Address for correspondence: Anne Markiewicz Lecturer, School of Social Work The University of Melbourne Parkville VIC 3052. Ph: 9344 9425 Fax: 9347 4375 E-mail: anne\_markiewicz.social\_work@muwaye.unimelb.edu.au*

TABLE 1  
NUMBERS OF CHILDREN WHO WERE STATE WARDS IN VICTORIA  
1944-1994 AT 2 YEAR INTERVALS

YEAR	NUMBER OF WARDS IN STATE CARE	REASONS FOR FLUCTUATIONS
1944	4,760	
1946	4,019	
1948	3,485	
1950	3,246	Decrease attributed to more timely termination of wardship
1954	3,121	4.04 per 1000 of 0-17 age group in Victoria.
1956	3,304	3.78 per 1000
1958	3,951	4.30 per 1000 increase attributed to population growth and migration.
1960	4,775	4.83 per 1000
1962	4,542	
1964	5,756	All wards admitted to the SWD placed either in the Family Welfare Division or the Youth Welfare Division.
1966	6,415	
1968	6,696	
1970	7,045	Media concern re overcrowding at Allambie.
1972	7,236	
1974	6,677	
1976	6,601	Decline seen to be result of regionalisation and the after care program. 4.9 per 1000 of population.
1978	4,611	Reduction seen to be due to effect of preventative programs. 4.3 per 1000 of pop.
1980	4,158	3.5 per 1000 of pop under 18.
1982	3,832	3.3 per 1000
1984	3,053	
1986	2,922	
1988	2,720	
1990	2,522	
1992	2,033	
1994	2,147	

This article is constructed principally through the lens of the Department, as it is their Annual Reports that have provided the main source of data. Child welfare in Victoria is characterised by the prominence of the non-government sector in the provision of services, and this feature is highlighted throughout

the article. The perspective is thus from the government outwards, providing an administrative rather than a child and family focus. The real experience of wards of the state is vital, and others have captured it or are in the process of doing so. The focus of this article is on programs provided, fluctuations in

models, and numbers in care. This should provide a backdrop for any material collected on personal experiences of wardship.

### EARLY CHILD WELFARE IN VICTORIA: RESCUE AND REFORM

From the time of European settlement in Victoria until the 1850s, charitable organisations subsidised by the government provided services for destitute children. The growth of population and immigration in the nineteenth century resulting from the Gold Rush, gave rise to concern about the supervision of children as a result of unemployment, poverty and family breakdown (Van Krieken 1991). The government's *laissez-faire* approach to direct intervention continued until the introduction of the Neglected and Criminal Children's Act in 1864, establishing a Department for Neglected Children and Reformatory Schools. The Act empowered the state to open industrial schools, and defined both the situations where children might be removed and the legal obligation of parents to contribute to the support of their children (Tierney 1963). Industrial schools were established for abandoned or wandering children, and reformatories for the offending children. The legislators who passed the Act were determined not to encourage dependency or pauperisation by introducing the equivalent to England's Poor Law, and intended schools to cater for young offenders and 'street Arabs', but the majority of children in schools were destitute (*CSV Annual Report 1989/90*).

Boarding out was introduced in 1872 and in active use until the depression of 1930 when it decreased in importance (Tierney 1963). Boarding out was seen as a way of replacing the existing family with another, more respectable one, the key to individual improvement for pauper children. It was also considered as a way of 'emptying the barracks' of children (Van Krieken 1991, p. 75), and dealing with the unsuitability of buildings for housing children, identified by a Royal Commission. By 1884, 82% of state wards were boarded out.

The Victorian Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children was established in 1896 to undertake the responsibility of investigating ill treatment of children, and in addition philanthropists from the Collins Street Scots Church undertook the role of child-saving, with Selina Sutherland organising rescue work with girls and young children.

The growth of child welfare in the early twentieth century reflected a new emerging relationship between the state, children and families in industrial societies (Van Krieken 1991, p. 100). There was an emerging notion of reforms in child welfare, exemplified by the establishment of the Victorian children's court and probation service in 1906, which set up a separate court to deal with neglected and offending children (Jaggs 1986).

The period between the 1920s and the 1940s has been described as reflecting the emergence of faith in the bureaucracy as a means for providing scientific and systematic solutions to society's problems (Van Krieken 1991, p. 112). Australia had extended its range of income security provisions in the early 1940s, introducing the principle that those in need are entitled to public support. In child welfare, boarding out declined in favour of institutional care under voluntary auspice, which might also be seen as a reflection of these broader trends.

### MONITORING STANDARDS AND RE-ENTRY TO RESIDENTIAL CARE

The 1954 Children's Welfare Act was heralded as a significant piece of legislation in child welfare history. It was said to be a notable milestone on the road of progress in child welfare in this state, not only for the Department, but for all voluntary organisations engaged in the care of children (*CWD Annual Report 1955*). Tierney (1963) considered that the new department was empowered to perform three central functions: to deal with children committed to it by the children's court, to exercise certain licensing and supervisory powers, and to provide assistance to needy children living in

their own homes. Apprehension of children rested with the police force or any person authorised by the Minister, which had the intention of allowing for the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children to continue in its role.

The requirement that all children's institutions register with the Children's Welfare Department and meet prescribed standards of care resulted in the department focussing on improving overall standards of care for institutionalised children, in addition to reducing the influx of children into care. The Children's Welfare Association, an association of non-government child welfare agencies founded in 1912, did much to advocate for smaller institutions, trained staff, and higher standards of physical and emotional care (Jaggs 1986, p. 168).

The role of the voluntary, charitable and denominational agencies in the provision of children's homes was highly significant as they were the main service providers in placing children. In 1957 there were 68 voluntary institutions, managed by 44 different controlling authorities (Tierney 1963). A random but representative sample of some of these agencies is provided in Table 3, to indicate the importance of denomination, the geographical spread, and the specificity of gender and age of the target group. Tierney (1963) noted that the gender and age specific practices resulted in children in long-term care having to move at regular intervals, and being split from their siblings. There were ambiguous relationships between the government and non-government sectors following the establishment of the Children's Welfare Department, including adjustment to its new role of monitoring standards of approved children's homes, and limited ability to increase the level of government funding (Jaggs 1986, p. 159).

Turana (an aboriginal word meaning rainbow), and formerly known as the Children's Welfare Department's Receiving Depot for Girls and Boys, was the only establishment conducted by the Department at this time. Turana

operated as a remand, reception and transit depot, and was required to accommodate all types of children, male and female, from a few days old to 19 years of age, delinquent and non-delinquent (*CWD Annual Report 1955*). Particularly difficult to place children were identified as babies and pre-school children, school-age boys with absconding and other behavioural difficulties, children with physical and emotional difficulties, children who were out-patients at hospitals, and 'backward' or other problem boys and girls who were able to undertake employment but needed guidance and supervision (*CWD Annual Report 1955*). Thus, while Turana was intended to function as a temporary placement, for many children it became their permanent home. The normal total capacity of Turana was 265; however, serious overcrowding often occurred as the numbers exceeded capacity (note 1960 in Table 2).

Once the Department was authorised to establish and manage its own institutions, the need for accommodation for children who fell outside the parameters of the non-government sector became a priority (Jaggs 1986, p. 160). During 1960 the Department saw the necessity to establish new children's homes for accommodation of those wards who 'have special needs and problems', while the voluntary agencies remained under capacity for residents (*CWD Annual Report 1960*). The Department saw that there were insufficient homes to cater for children with physical, mental and other handicaps, and over-provision of homes for the accommodation of normal, healthy children of school age (*CWD Annual Report 1960*). Protestant children were seen to be particularly disadvantaged, as the Catholic Church provided facilities for mentally retarded (see editors note) children, the deaf, the blind, and female delinquents. Catholic boys between 11 and 14, described as pre-delinquents, were seen to be ill-served by the Catholic system, while Protestant boys had access to Tally-Ho Boys' Village, and the Salvation Army in Bayswater.

TABLE 2 CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN CARE BY PLACEMENT TYPE 1946-1995

Year	Board out/ foster care	Family Group Home	Placed with view to adopt	Institutional care/resid- ential care	Reception care	Live-in employment	Home released or placed with relatives
1946	664			1,683	121	262	1,098
1950	457			1,490	131	210	788
1955	407		71	1,493	231	106	289
1960	1,027			1,897	284	301	725
1965	694 (11.8%)	91	90 (2.6%)	2,288 (37.8%)	Allambie 174 (2.9%)	4 (0.1%)	Home release 1,401 (19.5%)
1970	608 (8.6%)	101 (1.4%)	90 (1.3%)	2,487 (35.3%)	Allambie 241 (3.4%)	-	1,794 (25.5%)
1975	559 (8.6%)			2,112 (32.5%)	Reception 387 (6%)		1,885 (29%)
1980	523	755	81	1,320	216		
1985	480	594	99	634	191		
1990	1,043	531	20	258	61 ward 38 non- ward		3,090
1995	*	*	*	*	*		*

\* numbers not available as Annual Report moves to throughput measures (daily average) in foster care and residential care.

The opening of Winlaton by the Department at Nunawading in 1956 was seen as a much needed outlet for 'teenage problem girls' (*CWD Annual Report 1955*). It was intended to accommodate 45, but by 1958 housed 66 girls. In October 1957, the first two departmental family group homes were established, and by 1958 there were 10 family group homes functioning in the northern suburbs of Melbourne (*CWD Annual Report 1958*). In each family group home, there was to be a maximum of 8 children, 18 months old upwards. Each home was to be staffed by a resident cottage mother, 'preferably a married woman whose husband goes out to his ordinary work' (*CWD Annual Report 1958*). In 1958 the Department established Hillside Boys' Home in Wheelers Hill to cater for Catholic boys, and it was noted that 27

of the 35 boys were indeed Roman Catholics (*CWD Annual Report 1960*).

The Department continued to develop homes, hostels and reception centres and, by 1960, had Turana (reception), Winlaton (girls' training centre), Winbirra (girls' remand centre), Leawarra (girls' hostel), Hillside (boys' home), Sutton Grange (children's home in Mornington), Sunshine Boys' Hostel, and 12 family group homes in the northern suburbs and one at Ararat. It was also in the process of establishing Pirra (a children's home at Lara), Allambie (reception centre in Burwood), and Ballarat Reception Centre. These new establishments sought to ameliorate the overcrowding at Turana.

The child migration program was also a feature of the Department's work at

this time. During 1946 the Commonwealth government introduced legislation to bring into Australia a number of children and young people under 21 years of age, who came from overseas without their parents or relatives to reside in Victoria. The male juvenile migrants who were over school leaving age were placed in rural occupations while girls went into domestic service (*CWD Annual Report 1949*; *CWD Annual Report 1950*). The Department encouraged younger migrant children to be placed in 'the private homes of suitable foster folk' (*CWD Annual Report 1958*), or to remain in institutions until they were ready for employment. It was not until 1967 that the last group of children was shipped to Australia (Liddell 1993).

Another feature of the Department was the administration of the Street Trading Act of 1928, which applied to the City of Melbourne. A board was appointed to license boys under 14 or girls under 21 to sell newspapers, other printed material, matches or flowers, to perform for profit (busking), or to clean boots and shoes. An inspector was employed to supervise street traders, and detect breaches of the Act (*CWD Annual Report 1951; CWD Annual Report 1952*).

Juvenile delinquency was a further responsibility of the Children's Welfare Department. Committals to the care of the Department for correctional treatment were made under the Children's Court Act for precise offences, whereas admissions of delinquents included situations where the young person was felt to 'lapse or be likely to lapse into a career of vice and crime'. Out of 181 committals in 1958, all were boys.

By contrast, of 423 admissions of delinquents in 1958, 344 were boys and 79 were girls (*CWD Annual Report 1958*). The gender imbalance of males in juvenile justice was clear during this period, as was the emerging theme of young women being considered to be in moral danger and requiring protection.

With the dissemination of theories on child development, attachment and maternal deprivation, foster care re-emerged as a preferred option, and in 1960 there were over 1000 wards in foster care (21.5% of the total wards) (see Table 2). The remainder of children were seen as inappropriate for foster care for various reasons such as delinquency, mental status, being employed teenagers in live-in and hostel accommodation or those belonging to a sibling group. In 1960 the department saw the target for potential foster placements as 30% of wards (*CWD Annual Report 1960*).

### CONTINUED INSTITUTIONAL BUILDING AND RISING NUMBERS IN CARE

In July 1961 the Social Welfare Act was passed, establishing the Social Welfare Department. The Director-General, Alex Whatmore, had a vision of integrated family and corrections functions which would undertake

preventative social measures. Whatmore believed that work with families prone to breakdown might alleviate the development of future delinquency and offending behaviour of family members. This led to the establishment of divisions of Family Welfare, Youth Welfare, Probation and Parole and the Prisons under the one departmental auspice.

Allambie reception centre, a campus cottage institution purchased from the Presbyterian Church, became the main reception, classification and transit centre for the Department from 1961. It initially accommodated 90 children, with girls from 2 to 14 years and boys from 2 to 10 years. A section accommodating 40 babies and toddlers was added in 1964. Turana was thus left to cater for boys from 10 to 16 years, and by 1964 was converted for use by the Youth Welfare Division. The Gables Children's Home in Kew was established in 1962, with a capacity for 25 children.

The decentralisation of the Department to regional centres began in the 1960s with offices established at Geelong, Ballarat, Bendigo, Morwell, Mildura and Shepparton. Two regional reception centres operated in Ballarat and Mildura (1963), with a third privately run centre in Bendigo (1964). By 1966 there were suburban offices at Dandenong, Frankston and Preston. In 1966 Ashdene Boys' Home was opened in Olinda.

There was an increase in the numbers of children home-released in 1965, 806 children being returned to families and relatives (*SWD Annual Report 1966*). This was not, however, mirrored by a reduction in the numbers of state wards (see Table 1) and these numbers continued to rise. Home-release breakdowns (approximately 25%) were attributed in part to limited staff engaged in after-care work (*SWD Annual Report 1968*). The increase in numbers of wards resulted in overcrowding in institutions, particularly Allambie, resulting in adverse publicity in the press, and prompting Whatmore to argue for preventative services to stem the tide. Jaggs (1986) commented that the increasing numbers in care were partly attributable to overall population in-

crease, but also to the higher visibility of 'failing families' in the prosperous post-war years, the increase in female police members, and finally to changes in definition of children in need of care and protection which were part of the 1954 Act (Jaggs 1986, p. 168).

During 1971 nine additional family group homes were developed, bringing the total to 23, and the Lady Duggan home for 2 to 5-year-olds was established. Concern was again expressed regarding the inadequate placements available for disturbed adolescents, and children with mental and physical handicaps. The media further highlighted overcrowding problems at Allambie.

In June 1971 approved children's homes conducted by denominational and other charitable organisations were caring for 42% of the wards under state care (*SWD Annual Report 1971*) (see Table 3). The charitable residential organisations recognised that they were now, in effect, reduced to acting as the Department's residential arm (Jaggs 1986, p. 177). During 1974 it was noted that 10 children's homes had closed, beginning a trend which was seen to result from improving standards and rising costs, with organisations deciding that they had neither the staff nor the financial resources to go on (*SWD Annual Report 1974*). The institutional model, initially based upon cheap labour, was being pressured by award and pay conditions being won by child care staff. By 1975 the department had decided to fund 90% of staff salaries in non-departmental children's homes as a result of intensive lobbying by voluntary agencies. The growth in family group homes as a preferred model for both the Department and the non-government sector was evident as, by 1975, there were 60 family group homes in urban and metropolitan areas.

Home release continued to be highlighted by the Department, with a priority system developed in 1975 to provide services to families who could most benefit, and a home release option to be exercised by the reception centres. These moves were made to avoid past experiences where children remained in homes for years because home release prospects were not fully explored. 'This has led to an increasing awareness

TABLE 3 SAMPLE OF NON-DEPARTMENTAL INSTITUTIONS CARING FOR STATE WARDS IN 1960

Institution	Location	Sexes and Ages	Denomination
St. Gabriels' Home	Balwyn	Babies to 1.5 years	Church of England
St. Lukes Toddlers' Home	Bendigo	Boys and girls to 5 years	Church of England
St. Agnes' Home for Girls	Glenroy	Girls 5-14 years	Church of England
St. John's Homes for Boys	Canterbury	Boys 5-14	Church of England
St. Joseph's Foundling Home	Broadmeadows	Babies to 3 years	Roman Catholic
St. Anthony's Home	Kew	Boys and girls 3-6 years	Roman Catholic
St. Joseph's Home	Surrey Hills	Boys 6-9 years	Roman Catholic
St. Vincent de Paul Boys' Orphanage	South Melbourne	Boys 9-16 years	Roman Catholic
St Vincent de Paul Girls' Orphanage	South Melbourne	Girls 5-16 years	Roman Catholic
St. Catherine's Orphanage	Geelong	Boys 3-8 and girls 3-16	Roman Catholic
St. Augustine's	Geelong	Boys 9-15.5 years	Roman Catholic
Convent of the Good Shepherd	Abbotsford	Girls 3-18 years	Roman Catholic
Marrilac House	Brighton	Girls 6-18 mentally retarded	Roman Catholic
The Haven	North Fitzroy	Babies to 2 years	Salvation Army
Bayswater Boys' Home	Bayswater	Boys 8-14	Salvation Army
East Kew Girls' Home	East Kew	Girls 3-16	Salvation Army
Tally Ho Boys' Village	Tally Ho	Boys 11-15	Methodist
Methodist Babies' Home	South Yarra	Babies 1-3	Methodist
Methodist Peace Memorial Homes for Children	Burwood	Boys and girls 4-14 years	Methodist
Presbyterian Babies' home	Camberwell	Babies to 3 years	Presbyterian
Kildonan	Burwood	Boys and Girls 2-15	Presbyterian
Lutheran Peace Memorial Home	Kew	Boys and girls 3-14	Lutheran
Burwood Boys' Home	Burwood	Boys 3.5-16	non-denominational
Bethany Home	Geelong	Boys and girls to 5 years	non-denominational
Bery St. Foundling Hospital	East Melbourne	Babies to 3 years	non-denominational
Sutherland Homes	Diamond Creek	Boys and girls school age +	non-denominational
Victorian Children's Aid Society	Parkville	Boys and girls	non-denominational
Glastonbury	Geelong	Boys and girls 4-14	Protestant
Melbourne City Mission	Brunswick	Boys and girls to 8 years	inter-denominational

among staff of the effects of institutionalisation' (*SWD Annual Report 1974/5*).

By 1976 the number of wards in care had continued to decline, resulting in the closure of a further two children's

homes surplus to requirements (Sutton Grange in Mornington and Nazareth in Ballarat). Liddell (1993) notes that notions of deinstitutionalisation and normalisation emerged in the 1970s, seeing services and facilities localised,

and services attempting to duplicate normal living conditions.

The issues around payment for the provision of residential care services by the non-government sector escalated to the point where an enquiry into child

care services in Victoria was conducted, the findings of which were produced in the Norgard Report (1976). The members of this enquiry found that the Department was residual in its approach, did not promote community welfare, and that removing children from families should be a course of last resort (Jaggs 1986). In 1978 a White Paper, *The future of social welfare in Victoria*, endorsed the progressive family policies arising from the Norgard Report and expressed the need for a broader community framework. Both these reports resulted in the Department adopting a broader role in the community, and its title was changed to Department of Community Welfare Services in 1978.

### REDEVELOPMENT AND THE EMERGENCE OF A COMMUNITY FOCUS

On 1 April 1978 the new division of family and adolescent services came into existence, incorporating the former functions of the family and youth welfare divisions. The provision of family support services became part of this new mandate, with the aim of placing children as near to home as possible. The regionalisation process which began in the early 1970s was sufficiently down the track to allow regional centres to undertake many of the responsibilities of this division. The concept of a range of facilities available in each region emerged, with the goal of development of a state-wide network of regional reception centres. For Allambie, regionalisation initially meant reduction of its performance of case planning and after care responsibilities.

The move away from large children's homes to smaller family group homes continued in the late 1970s, with both the government and voluntary sector taking this direction. The decline in wardship numbers resulted in further closure of facilities, with some short-term and emergency units developed in their place. By 1979 case planning and review structures were built into regional services.

During the early 1980s the spread of residential services was seen to be ad hoc and requiring redistribution. Consequently facilities such as

Kildonan, Berry Street, and St Joseph's were encouraged to relocate from the inner east suburbs to the inner urban region. The Salvation Army moved from the outer east suburbs to the western region, and St John's moved from the inner east to the north western suburbs. In all, three congregate care facilities made way for 14 new facilities of a community-based nature (*DCWS Annual Report 1980/81*).

By 1982, the residential care program had 190 facilities operated by 41 voluntary agencies in 18 regions of Victoria, in addition to the Department's own facilities of four children's homes and 69 family group homes (*DCWS Annual Report 1981/2*). Further decline in the number of children in facilities was noted, as was the new focus on family support services. There was concern expressed that, though the numbers in residential care had reduced, those in care were more demanding and required more support.

Further relocations of residential facilities to establish regional residential care networks occurred in 1982. St Vincent de Paul's home in Black Rock, St Joseph's Flemington, Tally Ho Village, Burwood Children's Homes and Menzies Homes for Children all undertook redevelopments. Two family group homes for Aboriginal children were opened by the Department. Fourteen regions operated a comprehensive foster care program, auspiced either by the Department or a voluntary agency.

There was a substantial review of child welfare legislation in 1982, chaired by Dr Terry Carney. This review stressed the rights of the individual and accountability of services, as well as the need to relate legal and welfare systems to the broader community. Annual wardship reviews were introduced in 1983 in an attempt to further reduce the number of wards, with increased emphasis on returning children to their families.

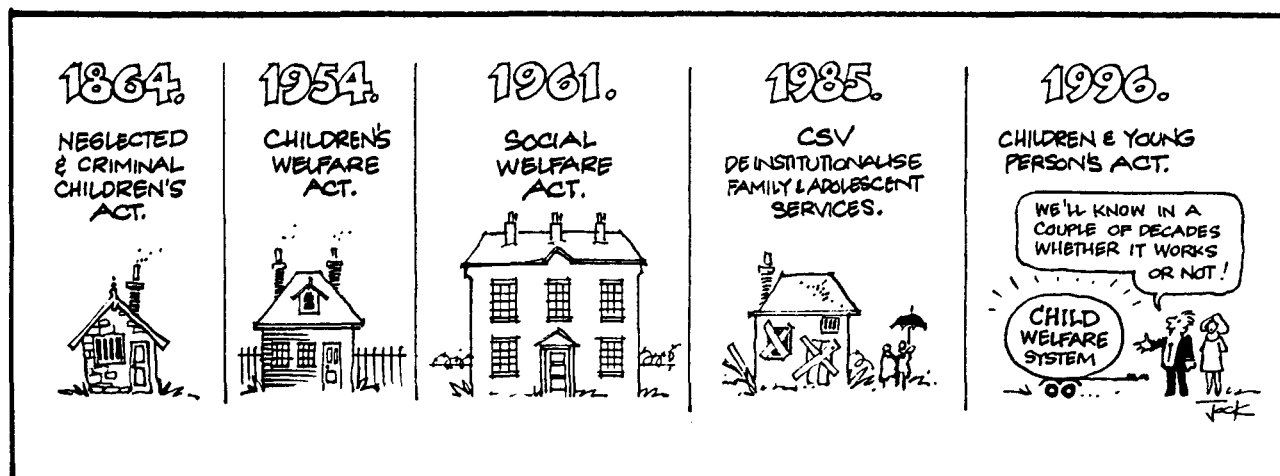
During 1983, 15 facilities closed, including Illoura Children's Homes and Tally Ho Campus Units. By June 1983, foster care programs were operating in 16 of the 18 regions, and payments to foster parents were increased in the State budget. New

adoption legislation was introduced during 1984 allowing for more open adoption, and adoption services for hard-to-place children were further developed.

In July 1983 the decision was made to establish an independent Office of Corrections following adverse community concern in regard to escapes from custody. This left the Department of Community Welfare Services to evaluate which areas of work, apart from statutory commitments, it could focus upon in the future.

### EXPANSION OF CHILD PROTECTION

In March 1985, Community Services Victoria (CSV) was established, and functions from the Health Department began to be transferred to its mandate (pre-school services, maternal and child health, family planning). The transfer of functions from other departments represented a significant ideological shift away from the focus on provision of statutory services to the provision of services to a wide range of the Victorian community. Later, in October 1985, responsibilities for the intellectually, physically and sensorily disabled were transferred to CSV. Hillside, the Gables and Ashdene underwent review with a view to closure during this period. In line with the closure of facilities, foster care became operational in all 18 regions, with 24 non-government organisations and 3 regional centres acting as auspice. The number of children placed in foster care increased by 60% over the previous year (*DCWS Annual Report 1984/5*). During this period the western suburbs regional reception centre was built. In August 1984 the Department took over the investigatory services previously undertaken by the Children's Protection Society (previously named the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children). Expanded new protective services programs were thus operationalised on a regional basis, with head office providing consultation and monitoring. The 'dual track' system whereby both the police and CSV undertook investigations resulted in some duplication and overlap, as either could become involved in investigation and the court process.



A complete 'overhaul' of the child protection program occurred during 1987/88 after widespread public criticism of the child protection system, through *The Age* series, 'Our children - our shame'. A review of child protection was undertaken by Mr Justice Fogarty in 1989, and this review raised serious concerns about the organisation of services, workloads, accountability, data management, service models, and staff recruitment and retention (*CSV Annual Report 1988/89*). As a result of this review, the Department phased out the dual track system over a 3 year period.

The category review was undertaken in response to a staffing crisis in child protection, resulting in a generic SOC category being introduced in 1988 to replace the previous social worker/welfare worker classifications. The children at risk register was established in December 1988 to provide a state-wide database on reported cases of abuse. The after hours service was introduced in March 1989, allowing for 24-hour access to the Department.

The redevelopment of residential services with the aim of reducing usage of Allambie, and developing regional self-sufficiency, was a feature of the late 1980s. Allambie was closed, leaving 58 family group homes, 9 short-term units, 8 medium-term units, 3 adolescent hostels, 182 non-government facilities, and a substantial regionalised foster care program and an adolescent community placement program (*CSV Annual Report 1990/91*). Service agreements between the Department and the non-

government sector, aimed at defining the mutual obligations of both parties, were introduced during the 1989/90 period.

In 1990 the Department began to implement the Children and Young Persons Act (1989) in response to the Carney review. This Act has set new directions for the Department, including the separation of offenders from non-offenders, and the establishment of grounds for physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional and psychological harm, and deprivation of basic or medical care, underpinned by proof that the child has suffered or is likely to suffer significant harm.

Intensive family-based services were developed during 1991, initially on a pilot basis, and then extended to numerous regions. The aim of the program was to provide intensive support to prevent placement of children away from home. These programs were all auspiced by the non-government sector.

By 1992, approximately 40% of placements were provided by CSV while 60% came from the non-government sector (*CSV Annual Report 1991/2*). During this year the Department agreed to fund 100% of the costs of approved placement and support services operated by the non-government sector, instead of the 85% previously available. This consolidates the view expressed by Jaggs (1986) about the non-government sector largely becoming the Department's residential arm. Secure welfare services involving short time-out stays for children and young people considered

to be too difficult for community facilities were established during this time.

Baltara Reception Centre was closed during 1992, ensuring that no child or young person in need of protection was cared for in an institution. It has since been redeveloped into secure welfare services. This was certainly a landmark in the phasing down of the developments of the 1960s.

#### PHASING OUT OF OLD MODELS AND EXAMINATION OF COST EFFICIENT ALTERNATIVES

Following the October 1992 State election, the number of departments was reduced, and the Health Department (HDV) merged with Community Services Victoria (CSV). The death of Daniel Valerio, and the subsequent community outrage, resulted in the introduction of mandatory reporting for certain professional groups in March 1993. Justice Fogarty was again to undertake a review of the state of child protection, and provide advice on the implementation of mandatory reporting. This review highlighted the inadequate level of service provision to adolescents, problems in the performance of the children's court, the impact of savings on the non-government sector, and the lack of data on program performance (*H&CS Annual Report 1993/4*). Notifications of child abuse subsequently spiralled (estimated as a 55% increase in 1993/4), placing immense stress on the child protection system.



The redesign and redevelopment of residential services continued, due to concern that Victoria had a comparatively low use of home-based care, together with the need to meet imposed savings of 7.7 million dollars (*H&CS Annual Report 1993/4*). It was indicated that South Australia placed up to 96% of its care population in foster care settings, in contrast to 63% in Victoria (Bath 1994). As part of this redevelopment, the Department intended to spread services more evenly across the State, provide for more cost-effective services, and move to unit pricing for client care, so that funds were linked to clients rather than services. This latter move resulted in my inability to collect data in 1995 of numbers of children in different placement types, breaking up a database dating back to 1946.

The aim of the service redevelopment is to move from a system that was highly dependent upon residential care, to one where home-based care and community options have been strengthened (*H&CS Annual Report 1993/4*). Fogarty stated in his review that many children, such as adolescents, may not be able to cope with the intensity of home-based placement (Mendes 1994).

Critics of this redevelopment question whether boarding out is not returning as an option for the mid 1990s and beyond. The full impact of budget cuts upon child welfare in Victoria is yet to be realised. By 1994 Victoria had reduced its numbers in care to 2,146 (or approximately 2.2 per 1000 0-17 year olds). This compares to 3.0 per 1000 in New South Wales, 3.3 in South Australia and 3.9 in Tasmania (Bath 1994). Placement rates in other countries, for example, are 7.7 per 1000 in the United States, 5.3 in the United Kingdom, and 10.5 in Denmark (Bath 1994). Victoria clearly has a low number of children and young people in care, and whether this is an achievement or a concern is yet to be established.

## CONCLUSION

The historical overview provided in this article indicates the changing pattern of child welfare practices in Victoria. There is a consistent claim of interest in the well-being of children in our

society, though how this should be achieved has varied from one phase of history to the next.

The beginning of child welfare in Victoria involved the formation of industrial schools and reformatories, under the umbrella of *The Neglected and Criminal Children's Act* (1864), aiming to resocialise the poor, disadvantaged and criminal. Boarding out became an alternative as institutions came under scrutiny for their poor conditions, then faded out by the depression of the 1930s. A prevailing ideology appeared to be one of child rescue, embedded with moral judgements.

The role of the state became a small one when compared to the part played by the non-government welfare organisations. The state went on through the late 1950s and 1960s to 'modernise' their response to child welfare, building institutions and group care facilities for those not able to be catered for in the non-government sector, and to overcome in part the gender/age categorisation used by this sector. By this time problem families were more prone to be regarded as inadequate rather than immoral (*CSV Annual Report 1989/90*, p. 41). The rapid developments during these times are seen to have left Victoria with a rich but complex heritage of services (*CSV Annual Report 1989/90* p. 1). Dr John Patterson commented that new institutions created as show pieces as recently as the 1960s are now anathema in many quarters (*CSV Annual Report 1989/90*, p. 2).

Demands for a more preventative response to child welfare emerged in the 1970s. There were demands for more intervention in child abuse, and a preventative strategy aimed at the alleviation of poverty. The institutional model, once based upon cheap labour, became expensive with the introduction of awards and pay conditions (*CSV Annual Report 1989/90*, p. 49). Progress thus became defined as deinstitutionalisation, avoidance of residential care, fewer beds and closure of congregate care homes. 'By 1980 congregate care was already dying and in 1990 it was dead' (*CSV Annual Report 1989/90*, p. 49).

During the 1980s there was an incremental process of redevelopment of residential services, moving facilities to areas of most need, and transforming homes into small programs and units. The 1980s were also a period of review, with the Carney report (1983) and the Fogarty report (1989). The philosophy of family participation in decision making in case planning and annual wardship review emerged, bringing with it the notion of the family as accountable rather than incompetent.

In the 1990s we see further closure of residential facilities, the attempt to meet dramatic budget cuts, and the emergence of foster care as a significant thrust. There is scepticism about the embracing of foster care as a cheaper alternative to residential care, and the outcome of this policy shift is yet to be determined (Bath 1994). Bath notes that Australia has a high reliance on foster care, when compared to placement patterns of other western countries.

There has been concern expressed that the decline in numbers of children in care in Victoria is mirrored by a dramatic increase in the number of homeless children and young people (Bath 1994). One can see in this decade a strong policy direction away from placement of children and young people in state facilities, without concurrent regard for the alternatives in place.

The history does indicate peaks and troughs, ebbs and flows in placement patterns and trends for children and young people in state care. It is essential that we evaluate and monitor current developments in the child welfare policies and practices of the 1990s in Victoria while maintaining a stance espousing the best interests of children. The challenge ahead of us is to ensure that we go forward rather than backward in time, and develop programmatic responses which we will not in hindsight reflect upon with regret. ☼

**Editor's note:** Some terminology has not been adjusted for present usage given the historical nature of this article, eg, references to *mentally retarded*.

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A report on...

## Choosing Better Practice

### ACWA Biennial Conference

4-8 August 1996

Well over 300 delegates from every state and territory participated in a stimulating and varied program at the Choosing Better Practice conference held recently in Sydney. The conference, hosted by the NSW Association of Child Welfare Agencies (ACWA) on behalf of the Child and Family Welfare Association of Australia (CAFWAA), featured presenters from around Australia and overseas.

Workshops and seminars focused on subjects pertinent to direct care workers, managers and clinical staff, while pre- and post-conference workshops provided for a more in-depth exploration of issues. There were stimulating plenary session presentations from the keynote speakers Dr Rick Small (USA) and Dr Mike Lindsay (UK), along with Mr Chris Sidoti (Commissioner for Human Rights and Equal Opportunity), Ms Ann Symonds (NSW MLC), and Ms Quentin Bryce (National Child Care Accreditation Council).

Other highlights of the conference included a presentation by young people from state bodies linked with the Australian Association of Young People in Care (AAYPIC) whose national conference had been held on the previous weekend, a humorous dinner speech by "Dr" Mary Hartman critiquing the inner lives of people who work with children and young people, and the formal public launch of CAFWAA, the national peak body for our industry, which was attended by around a hundred delegates.

The conference would have to be rated at one of the best in recent years given the number, variety and quality of workshop options and the opportunity for developing links with practitioners from across Australia. Along with other delegates I have returned to my work with renewed enthusiasm, eager to try out a number of new ideas. The organising staff from ACWA are to be congratulated for the thoughtful and professional organisation of this landmark event.

Howard Bath  
August 1996