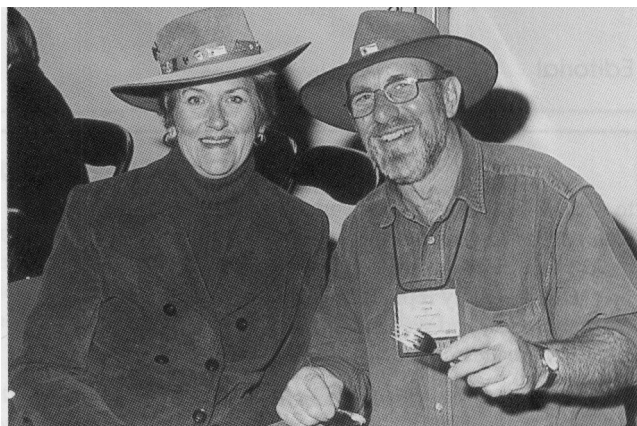


# Editorial

Lloyd Owen



As a national journal for the Australian field of child, youth and family welfare, *Children Australia* aims to encourage Australian practitioners and researchers to write about their work. There has not been a lot of Australian writing about foster care taken into the public domain. Conferences are often a means of making such a commitment and on this occasion the journal has been assisted by the International Foster Care Conference held in Melbourne in July this year to give special attention to foster care. The keynote addresses have been included and a number of other papers which have been submitted for publication. Some work was also commissioned to build on some of the conference themes. It has also been possible to briefly bring the Oz Child Information Service back to life to help with a set of recent abstracts on foster care. Unfortunately the service had to cease operations this year to help budgets get back to black. It is our hope that this special issue will make an informative contribution to the literature and that more practitioners, researchers and people affected by services will submit papers to be published in this and other journals. Conference participants are also reminded that the conference program contained a full set of abstracts of papers and workshops which were informative and provide a record of the conference proceedings. Although there are many references to the conference and it is our hope that much of the interest and stimulation of the event might be conveyed, it was not intended or possible to compile a proceedings of the conference for publication. What we have here is an international venture with some highlights, some snippets and an Australian flavour.

The legislation and responsibility for child, youth and family welfare in Australia is enacted at the state and territory government level. The Commonwealth Government has legislation in the area of family law and social security which translates into direct service if the issue affecting children concerns income security, or marital/parental rights and responsibilities. The Commonwealth's commitment is also responsible for representing Australians at the United Nations, and this extends to overseeing Australia's responsibilities under the ratified United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

When it comes to dealing with matters of child protection, juvenile justice and out of home care, the bifurcation of responsibilities for the well-being of families and children has not always been helpful in supporting and responding to research or the funding and proper evaluation of services for children and their families. This area of work is also complicated by the historical view that raising children is

something other than paid work – that in the main, costs should be borne by parents not the state. Apart from those who are actually doing it at the time, there seems to be only a grudging recognition that parenting children during a number of phases of their development is an exceptionally demanding and time consuming task. When it comes to the cost of raising children, our structural arrangements for sharing wealth are often a matter of contest. The wealth generating battleground is not always accessible to those engaged in parenting and, when it is, the rate of return is often insufficient to employ parental stand-ins. In our view the cost of not caring appropriately for children and young people as they mature is a serious matter for all societies and sections of the society. In this issue of *Children Australia* we hope to share some of the experience of those engaged in these tasks with readers who may have responsibility for developing policy, programs and resource allocation priorities.

Foster carers are often stand-ins for parents under strain, quite often as permanent carers they substitute for lost parents or parents unable to fulfil the role. The processes of growth and development usually will not wait for adults to sort out their affairs and societies generally have some arrangements for someone to step in or provide additional support to parental roles. In much of history and in many circumstances today the extended family is the expected first call for such support. Beyond them in many countries we find the institution of foster care. It is and has been labelled and packaged in various ways according to common conceptions of its role and nature. At this point in history, as the twentieth century closes, it is clear that foster care is being called on to provide sensitive and skilled support to other parents having difficulty raising their children, and to provide direct parenting to many troubled teenagers and children with special needs. There is fairly clear recognition that these tasks now generate a need for careful recruitment, selection, support and ongoing training and skill development. In England the proposal is more evident for foster care to be seen as a professional service. Some services there and elsewhere, with a special needs focus, are called professional foster care or therapeutic foster care. Debate about the form and level of payment is apparent in many places. Current concerns also include the extent to which both payment and support to carers extend into kinship care and permanent care or adoption. These themes and many others are picked up in the detail presented in this issue.

The co-hosts to the conference and those involved in its planning, provide some insight on the partnerships necessary

to successfully deliver this work and the interest it generates. Kathryn Howe provides a brief overview. We have grouped the content in this issue around the keynote addresses in a way which broadly represents the main themes adopted for the conference, and we hope this will give the overall work some coherence and aid accessibility for the reader.

In common with developing Australian custom, which seeks to revive ancient indigenous Australian practice, we pay respect to the traditional owners of the land on which we meet and the spiritual and life sustaining connection to it. The issue begins therefore with concern for indigenous children and acknowledgement of the tragic history of the stolen generation in Australia. Dr Michael Dodson provided a keynote address based on his work in the inquiry into these matters which resulted in the 'Bringing Them Home' report of the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission. We have added for the interest of readers the draft declaration for reconciliation recently released for public consultation by the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation. Another paper from the conference on the Aboriginal Placement Principle has already been published in the previous issue of *Children Australia* 24(3).

The next section builds on the theme of 'Today's Tough Issues' which included Dr Frank Kunstal's keynote, 'Reversing unnatural childhoods'. To extend the theme around individual growth and development in context, Sarah Wise has developed a paper on 'Coping and thriving - Not just in care'. To this has been added another popular contribution from Dr Jenn McIntosh dealing with the inevitable transitions in out of home care in a therapeutic way, realising the destructive potential of these changes.

The following section builds on the theme of 'Partnership - the caring team'. In a paper exploring the wider fostering network, Lynda Campbell responds to the keynote address by Jill Wain and refers to the array of presentations at the conference which adds to these ideas. She picks up on the relative absence from the conference of birth parents, as did Jill. Badal Moslehuddin from Oz Child adds also to Jill's observations on a commonly overlooked group, the natural children of foster families. Cas O'Neill promotes the often demonstrated significance of teachers and school connectedness for children.

Section four includes youth issues built on the keynote paper 'Celebrating Success' by Teresa Lum and Nicole Herbert. There is some input from CREATE, the new name for the organisation representing the interests of Australian children and young people in care which has achieved much in a short time. IFCO goals for the inclusion of young people were also realised, although not without some contests, at this conference with the election of some youth representatives on the Board. Sue Green has contributed a paper on leaving care. Leaving care is a hot topic around the world as research in recent years has pointed to dramatically diminished life chances for young people who have been through the care system. A number of studies and programs have developed in Australia following the lead of organisations in the United Kingdom such as 'First Key' and the 'Who Cares? Trust'.

In section five we pick up some international and global themes as we look forward to the future. We begin with an item of universal interest from Clive Sellick from the United Kingdom, drawing attention to the importance of research informing practice, and practice informing research. Many other international delegates contributed to the conference and Angela Maria Pangan drew on the experience of the Phillipines, pointing up some of the disparities of the north/south divide, registering the possibility that there is much in the way of ideas to share between countries and regions. A link is made between many of the delegates from developing countries who also participated in the Asia Pacific Forum on Families which met at the end of the conference. APFAM has launched a new journal for the region, and the second issue of its first volume contains two papers which originated at the IFCO conference, one by Stuart Stuart and one by Lloyd Owen. Professor Emily Jean McFadden and Jill Worrall's paper draws together themes of ethnicity, a global perspective and the opportunity IFCO conferences have provided to develop a new outlook and deal with some of the past practice shortcomings in services for people of colour. The future has to accommodate great diversity, new technologies and breathtaking change. As we enter a new millenium, what shepherding and shelter can we provide for families with misfortune and children at risk?

Provided for your use are the bibliography with abstracts drawn together from the Oz Child database by Pat Cosgriff with some assistance from Family and Society Abstracts developed by the Australian Institute of Family Studies, and some book reviews pertinent to foster care. One draws attention to the significance of grandparents, a topic in tune with both the raising of children and the end of 1999, the International Year of Older Persons.

Readers are invited to keep up this work and consider submitting more papers on foster care for publication. Specific avenues are future editions of *Children Australia*, the journal *Adoption & Fostering*, the *Asia Pacific Families: APFAM Journal* for the Asia Pacific Region, and the international journal, *Children & Society*. Contact details for each are given below.

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## 11<sup>th</sup> INTERNATIONAL FOSTER CARE ORGANISATION (IFCO) CONFERENCE

The 11<sup>th</sup> IFCO Conference was held at the University of Melbourne from the 19-23 July 1999. A total of 757 delegates attended from 34 countries. This included 601 adult delegates and 156 youth delegates from Europe, North America, Asia Pacific and Australia, Africa and other Asian countries. The Conference has been held biennially since 1981 and this was the first occasion that Australia had hosted the event and only the second time that it has been held in the Southern hemisphere.

The planning for this conference was a three year partnership between four co-hosts, the Foster Care Association of Victoria, the Victorian Association of Young People in Care (now known as CREATE), the Children's Welfare Association of Victoria and the Department of Human Services. The success of this event was attributed to the collaborative work effort put in by the Planning Committee that included a number of representatives from each of the co-hosts and also supporting areas including carers from the Special Needs Adoption and Permanent Care group and academics from La Trobe and Melbourne Universities.

Five keynote speakers were invited to address the conference:

- Angela Maria Pangan, Executive Director of the NORFIL Foundation – Philippines;
- Dr Mick Dodson, Director of the Indigenous Law Faculty NSW – Australia;
- Dr Frank Kunstal, psychologist and author – USA;
- Ms Teresa Lum, founding member of the Federation of British Columbia Youth In Care Network, co-presenting with Ms Nicole Herbert – Canada;
- Ms Jill Wain, foster parent and Manager of the Melton Foster Care Agency – Australia.

These presenters were chosen for their expertise and leadership in their field.

Each keynote presenter addressed a specific conference theme:

- 'Looking Forward - The changing face of foster care into the year 2000 and beyond' – Ms Pangan
- 'Indigenous Children in Care' – Dr. Dodson
- 'Today's Tough Issues' – Dr Kunstal
- 'Celebrating Success' – Ms Lum and Ms Herbert
- 'Partnership in Caring Team' – Ms Wain

In addition, 126 papers and workshops were presented over four days by some of the leading experts both nationally and internationally in the fields of foster care, youth, social and welfare work and research.

The conference participants evaluated the conference as a major success and the 5 day event hosted considerable debate and networking by all stakeholders in the home based care field.

The next IFCO European Regional Conference will be held in Cork, Ireland, 24-27 August 2000 - contact Conference Partners Ltd Dublin, ph +353-1-667-7188, fax +353-1-688-0292, email: [infor@atoi.ie](mailto:infor@atoi.ie)

The next Biennial World Conference will be in the Netherlands at Koningshof, 24-28 July 2001. The theme is Toward a 'Fostercaring' Society. Information on web: <http://www.pleegzorg.nl/ifco2001> OR email: [ifco@pleegzorg.nl](mailto:ifco@pleegzorg.nl)

### REFLECTION ON THE MELBOURNE IFCO CONFERENCE 1999

I am writing this, having just returned from a very successful conference in Australia. The success was due to the excellent partnership between the four hosts. The conference's theme 'Fostering the Future' was demonstrated throughout the week through excellent plenaries and workshops. There were over 700 delegates from around the world. We were given a wonderful opportunity to consider the achievements and learning in foster care so far, and to take that forward along with the future challenges into the millenium. Additionally, we were able to enjoy an extensive social programme which allowed us to make new friends and renew old acquaintances.

Each time I attend an IFCO conference, I come away realizing the importance of bringing together this international network. It is a unique experience for us all; it is the only experience whereby children, young people, carers, academics, ministers, etc, come together and debate the issues in relation to foster care. It always reinforces for me the diverse nature of foster care throughout the world, in that its usage varies considerably within countries and regions. However, universally it is a service for children and young people and the views that they express that need to inform any future direction for the foster care service internationally.

Gerri McAndrew, President  
International Foster Care Organisation