

Introducing the Editors ...

The celebration of 30 years of *Children Australia* heralds a new arrangement for editorship of the journal. This year Lloyd Owen has been joined by Jennifer Lehmann as a co-editor following Jennifer's invitation to be Guest Editor in 2004. Lloyd and Jennifer are longstanding colleagues, having first worked together in the days of Allambie Reception Centre and Winlaton – both institutions of the former Social Welfare Department of Victoria for children and young people. Over the years their paths have crossed until, in 2000, they found themselves together as lecturers in social work with La Trobe University. Both Lloyd and Jennifer have maintained strong links to the field of family, child and youth services as well as being involved in research and evaluation, and publishing their work. Coming together through the editorship of *Children Australia* provides the journal with their knowledge and skills as both practitioners and as academics and ensures that the needs of the readership will continue to be supported.

Editorial

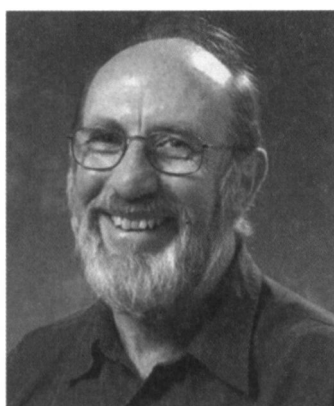
Lloyd Owen and Jennifer Lehmann

This issue of *Children Australia* marks the beginning of the journal's 30th year of publication, and in a Special Edition to be published later this year we will mark this anniversary with reflections on the past. The history of the journal will be featured in that edition, but in this first edition for 2005, a brief reminiscence is surely appropriate.

For the first 15 years of its existence the journal was known as Australian Child & Family Welfare, and it was initially published by the Children's Welfare Association of Victoria as the quarterly journal of the Child and Family Welfare Council of Australia. At that time many of the specialist journals failed to appeal to the broad readership in social welfare and, of course, it has been the intention to provide material for this broad readership ever since. In 1990 it became the quarterly journal of the National Children's Bureau of Australia Inc. (NCBA) and in that year it took on the title of *Children Australia*, at the same time moving closer to ongoing editorial support from La Trobe University. The journal now receives contributions from a variety of sources, including the social welfare field and, increasingly, from field workers who have entered academia and want to share ideas.

Throughout, the journal has had the practical support of Oz Child and its forerunners, and although the NCBA was subsumed in the amalgamation that formed Oz Child, *Children Australia* continues to offer an independent forum with a national focus.

Children Australia has developed something of a tradition of marking the passing of each of the United Nations declared international years, and this year of 2005 is the International Year of Microcredit. Any time spent near the grassroots in a



developing country soon acquaints the observer with the imbalance in the global distribution of resources and the grinding effects of poverty. One is very likely to encounter the amazing achievements of people, especially women, empowered by access to small amounts of no collateral, low interest credit. The Grameen Bank, and other institutions that followed its example, have demonstrated over nearly thirty years the significance of this approach to poverty alleviation based on trust, mutuality and accountability without legal instruments. Founded by Professor Muhammad Yunis in Bangladesh in 1976, the Grameen Bank now has 4 million borrowers, 96% of them women, and works in 47,836 villages. Ownership is with borrowers (94%) and the Government (6%). It has disbursed the equivalent of 4.57 billion US dollars since its inception and has a 98.85% loan recovery rate. In a world which appears to be dominated often by antagonistic viewpoints and highly competitive behaviour, examples of trust, mutuality and cooperation are like a breath of fresh air (www.grameen-info.org).

Considering the importance of providing opportunities to families that impact so significantly on their children, how is it that an affluent country like Australia still neglects, or tackles piecemeal, the issues addressed in this edition of the journal? The first article in this edition is one written by Philip Mendes on children leaving care in Australia. It highlights an area of constant neglect and tracks both the formation of the Care Leavers of Australia Network (CLAN) and the Senate Inquiry report 'Forgotten Australians' which addresses a number of key questions including the extent to which children in care were exposed to unsafe, improper or unlawful treatment; the long-term social and economic

impact of such child abuse and neglect; whether governments should formally acknowledge or provide reparations to compensate for such abuse; and the implications for current child welfare policies and practices.

Max Liddell and Chris Goddard address another currently worrying issue — that of children in Australian detention centres. This paper follows earlier articles written by the authors and continues to document a range of concerns about abuses of children and young people in detention. Government policies have resulted in a range of abuses being experienced by these children which are in direct contra-vention of human rights, yet it appears that many Australians remain unconcerned about the plight of these people. This paper is challenging and demands further action to end the abuses of children who have found themselves on our shores. It also highlights the complexity of the structures that operate in Australia and the forces that determine the outcomes for these children.

Gail Winkworth and Morag McArthur, in describing the development of a school based, human services program in the ACT, raise important issues supporting the use of conceptually sound program models with integrated evaluation, acknowledging that it has been known for a long time that services need to be underpinned by thorough planning and evaluation. It is also within the practice wisdom of human service professionals that school based services hold strong potential for prevention and attention to the difficulties experienced by children and families. Yet we continue to dismiss the school context, school communities and neighbourhoods as bases for integrated services or, at best, attempt from time to time to develop programs without the commitment over a period of years that such initiatives require to achieve success. Perhaps this is, in part, due to the tendency for professional disciplines to 'silo' themselves; perhaps because the ideological position of recent decades has led to increasingly unsympathetic responses to what used to be seen as a normal part of community life and sharing of resources.

Kay McLeod and Chris Goddard provide some essential clues as to how some issues are 'silenced' in their article titled 'The ritual abuse of children: A critical perspective'. This paper focuses on the organised ritual abuse of children. Their article suggests that we look carefully at the social context, social forces, the nature of evidence accepted as credible and the dominant voices for answers as to why some issues are silenced while others are taken seriously. Attention is given to the emergence and re-emergence of recognition of ritual abuse of children which, like many facets of human endeavour throughout history, are conveniently forgotten. Unfortunately, human nature hasn't changed that much over the centuries and the forces that silence debate and discussion — usually a combination of forces that coalesce to constrain, discredit, and create a discourse of disbelief — still result in the silence that follows.

Finally, we have included in this edition a section titled 'Current Perspectives ...' in which Claire Hoare's paper addresses the role of sport in the lives of children and young people — an area deemed important enough to be covered in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 31). This is a topical issue for many parents and professionals alike, as involvement in team and individual sports are held to develop a range of life skills needed if children are to achieve optimum development in our society. Debates about the sedentary lifestyles of children and the problem of obesity versus the negative aspects of competitive behaviours are raised in this article which encapsulates the range of opinions and concerns in contemporary society.

Lloyd Owen and Jennifer Lehmann
Co-editors, *Children Australia*