

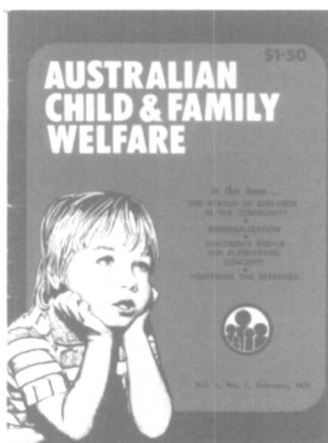
**1976****Children Australia**  
(formerly *Australian Child & Family Welfare*)**2005****30<sup>th</sup> year of publication**

## Reflections on the past 30 years

Lloyd Owen

This 30th year of publication of *Children Australia* seems to have generated a reflective impulse.

The journal was first established in 1976 with the title *Australian Child and Family Welfare* (quarterly), and it was known as such for the first 15 years of its existence. It was published by the Children's Welfare Association of Victoria as the quarterly journal of the Child and Family Welfare Council of Australia. Co-editors were the Rev Denis Oakley and Dr Peter O'Connor. Denis tells us that the funds to get it started came from the Children's Welfare Foundation. This foundation was an outstanding example of partnership between business and the non-government sector. Not without controversy, Denis performed on television in his clergyman clobber advertising products for Billy Guyatt stores, drawing in funds for the Foundation which were also applied to the establishment of Grassmere, a community-based youth facility, and to some research work into adoption and family law. The book review editor was Mr Cliff Picton, associate editor was Mr Max Liddell, Mr David Thackeray was business manager, Mr Vernon Knight was circulation manager and the committee providing support was Mrs Glenys Craig, Mr John Edwards, Mr Bill Hughes, Canon Neal Malloy OBE and Mrs Patsy Sebastian. It had a group of interstate representatives, Spencer Colliver, Ray Jenkins, Albert Kruipers, Rev Lyn Reilly, George Belchev, Adam Jamrozik, Geoff Aves and editorial consultants Concetta Ben, Prof Peter Boss, Spencer Colliver and Dr Len Tierney. In the editorial in the first issue was the explanation that the journal was being launched as so much was going on in child and family welfare, that there was a need for a forum. Many of the specialist journals failed to appeal to the broad readership in social welfare, whereas this journal would 'aim for the broad spectrum of people who make up the vast army of workers in the child and family welfare field ... Our concern is to open up discussion on policies and practices, to discuss innovations and the raising of standards.'



The journal has been plugging away at this task ever since, receiving material from both the field and academic sources, and increasingly field workers who have entered academia - a reflection of the 'professionalisation' of the workforce, one of many changes witnessed over the past 30 years. The organisations in which the journal has been embedded and which surround it have changed enormously in the intervening time.

The early 1970s had given birth to a greater level of involvement by the Commonwealth Government of Australia in matters of individual, family and community welfare. Initiatives in urban and regional development and the Australian assistance plan promoted a degree of decentralisation and localisation. The passage of the family law legislation which came into force at the beginning of 1976 gave the Commonwealth a major stake in family affairs. Universal health care and initiatives in indigenous affairs had moved somewhat. The Henderson poverty inquiry drew attention to the neediness of many in the population. Pensions and benefits were raised to 25% of average weekly earnings (NAA 2005). The level and cost of some of this change contributed to the dismissal of the Whitlam government in 1975 (Kelly 1994). As the 1970s continued to roll by with Malcolm Fraser at the helm of Australia, the nascent journal added to its list of involved honorary workers, consultants, and committee members, Neville Turner, Graham Gregory, Helen McLeish, Lea Urbinder, Alan Nicholls, Roy Jackson, Paul Napper and Cliff Wright. In 1977 Cliff Picton, then lecturer at Monash University and Chair of the Standing Committee on Adoption, took on the role of editor which he continued to the end of the decade.

1979 was the International Year of the Child and the journal participated in the kind of stocktaking such occasions generate. The themes addressed that year included the family, preventive and remedial services to children, children in a multi-racial and multicultural Australia, and the rights of children. The final editorial for the year drew

attention to the horrors then besetting children in Kampuchea, the kind of conflict, privation and genocide which our world still seems to have trouble preventing. In that year also the Child and Family Welfare Council of Australia transformed itself into the Children's Bureau of Australia. The intention was to add to the role of a coordinating federation of State and Territory child and family service organisations, a stronger action orientation to foster research, to undertake projects to increase the efficacy of children's services and to initiate new ones, to provide consultancy and evaluation services in the field of child and family services, and to sponsor activities and organisations which would further its objectives.

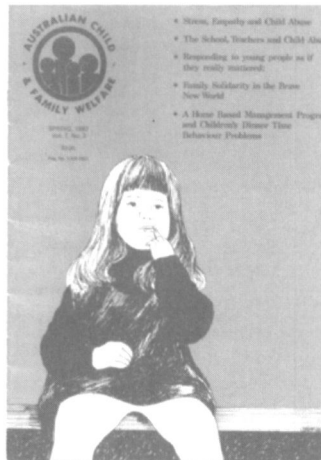
In 1980 Margarita Frederico, then at the University of Melbourne and subsequently at La Trobe University, took on the role of editor. The coalition government was returned to office in October 1980 and in January 1981 the first desk top computers went on sale. 1981 was also the International Year of Disabled Persons and the journal sought to make a feature of this. The government of the day was seeking to reduce reliance on big government, and the committee to review government function ('the razor gang') recommended the abolition of the number of agencies and the reduction of others. At the same time the Human Rights Commission Act was being proclaimed providing for a body to promote and protect human rights in line with all of the United Nations' instruments ratified by Australia (NAA 2005). Mendes (2003:22) describes this government's social welfare agenda as 'on the one hand based on cutting the public sector and reducing the alleged growing dependence on big government in favour of providing incentives for private expenditure. On the other hand, the government emphasised a welfarist compassion for those who are unable to support themselves.' 1983 was a fairly momentous year. In January adoption of the transmission control protocol/Internet protocol enabled the development of a supranational Internet. In March, after a double dissolution, Bob Hawke became Prime Minister. Victoria experienced the devastating Ash Wednesday bushfires. An economic summit established the prices and incomes Accord. In December the Australian dollar was floated on the international money market.

Contributors to the journal continued to tackle a wide variety of micro and macro issues of concern to children and families. The committee of the early 1980s included

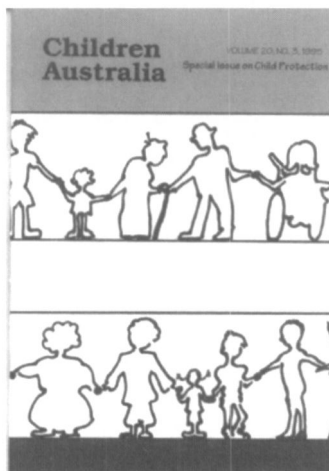
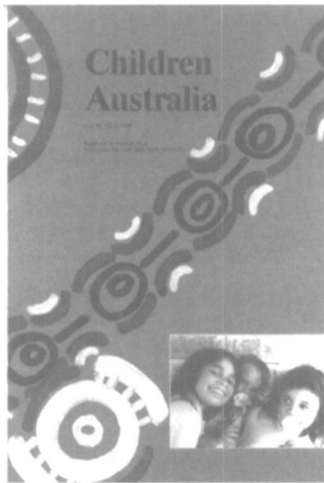
Rosemary Calder, John Edwards, Margarita Frederico, Jeff Gilmour, Chris Goddard, Graeme Gregory, Gary Jungwirth, Paul Napper, Denis Oakley, Cliff Picton and Cliff Wright. Marie Campbell and later Ruth Stewart served as book review editors. Jeff Gilmour took over layout and design responsibility. By 1982 Yehudi Blacher and Annette Hourigan began serving as associate editors. By late that year the journal had also adopted an academic referee system for submitted articles. While the Australian economy began to become a much more freewheeling affair with the deregulation of banks, some contributors to the journal were still wrestling with how to assess the real cost of caring for children and providing comprehensive family support in a restrictive budgetary climate. In the mid-1980s Ron Tiffen and Lloyd Owen joined the journal team. 1985 was also International Year of Youth giving some momentum to concerns for young people in the rapidly changing environment. Rights and participation get a mention among many topics of interest as

Australia headed into 'the recession we had to have' and the growing exclusion of young people from the labour market became a more prominent concern. A growing prominence of child maltreatment and child protection issues was given some emphasis through Chris Goddard's Point and Counterpoint column which began to make a regular appearance in 1988. Ongoing, was interest in the various forms of substitute care for different purposes and populations, often coupled with issues concerning family involvement and family support. A very popular edition concerning response to natural disasters appeared in 1987. In that year also June Allan took up the role of book review editor. Toward the end of 1988 Lloyd Owen took over the editorial role with an issue in which the question was being asked: the Family Court of Australia – triumph or disaster?. The decade ended within the recession we had to have (Kelly 1994), whilst contributors to the journal kept grinding away at the many challenging issues being faced in the child and family welfare field. Vexing moral questions appeared alongside difficult organisational issues, legal concerns and the occasional hopeful note about how we can do it better.

One delightful piece in 1989 described the outstanding work of the Kevin Heinze Garden Centre and the way in which growing things can nurture hope and a positive outlook for children and young people who are grappling with troubles or disabilities.



In 1990 the Children's Bureau of Australia was re-established as the National Children's Bureau of Australia (NCBA), and we became the quarterly journal of the NCBA. In that year the journal acquired the title of *Children Australia* and moved closer to ongoing editorial support from La Trobe University, whilst administrative, sub-editing, layout and production tasks were taken on by staff at the NCBA, in particular Louise Riordan and Lorraine Redshaw. A new Publications Committee was also established at that time (Margarita Frederico, June Allan, John Edwards, Chris Goddard, Denis Oakley and Lloyd Owen). In that year the journal featured a roundup of the state of Australia's children, including the views of each of the Commonwealth and State or Territory political leaders. The decade had a brave beginning with Australia becoming a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Our country was a participant in the World Summit for children organised by UNICEF where major commitments were made to bettering the lot of the world's children. The board of the NCBA had a special meeting with the Governor General and discussed its intentions in publication, research and advocacy. The journal was embedded in the work of the NCBA alongside an outstanding Information Service and other publication activities (including the Particular Care series, and the Profile of Young Australians). These arrangements were maintained for the first four years of the decade, which also saw the establishment of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, the return of the Labour government at the 1990 election, the first Gulf war, the report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, the transfer of prime ministership from Bob Hawke to Paul Keating, the first Web browser on the market, the conclusion of the Mabo case and the subsequent native title act, the Somalian crisis, the re-election of the government in 1993, the establishment of the Industrial Relations Court of Australia and the end of apartheid in South Africa. 1993 was the Year of the World's Indigenous Peoples and 1994 was the International Year of the Family, both concerns of great interest to the journal. Contributions from members of the aboriginal community were solicited and family preservation programs and family group conferencing were included among the usual array of issues of interest to readers. Some specific attention had been given earlier to the rural crisis as in the early 1990s Australia was still recovering from the recession. Also in 1993, the journal was invited to participate in a symposium at the Family



Research Conference in Manly, NSW. An independent researcher had identified it as one which was being read by practitioners. This led to some reflection on its philosophies, purpose and approach and the way these would be presented to readers and contributors. An approach which aims hard to exclude contributions – an approach not uncommon in the publishing industry – was rejected in favour of trying to be inclusive, without compromising a final product of acceptable quality.

In 1994 also a major organisational restructure occurred which resulted in the demise of the NCBA in the amalgamation and rationalisation of agencies which became Oz Child: Children Australia Inc. Editorial support structures were slimmed down first to an editorial advisory committee, and then we were left with production and administration being undertaken by Oz Child staff, and an editorial effort at La Trobe University by Lloyd Owen as editor, and a succession of outstanding editorial assistants:

Tania Owen, who was just entering the workforce; Danielle Garrett who, in spite of being wheelchair bound, had successfully completed her social work degree, helped the journal extensively before moving on to parenthood; Paige Elston who gave much help between completing university studies and entering the workforce as a police officer; and others who happened to be passing by for brief periods such as Kristen Beadle and Dr. Murray Lewis.

In 1996 a change of government saw John Howard being sworn in as Prime Minister. In the world of the journal, Lorraine Redshaw continued to undertake administrative functions and also took over the sub-editing and preparation for production. It was the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty, but there continued to be some challenges for the journal and the Information Service with which it was connected. Contributors to the journal continued to share their ideas and the products of research. 1997 signalled some interesting trends among the articles in areas of Commonwealth interest such as strengthening families and communities, the child support scheme, children's contact centres and child protection which was beginning to attract attention at the national level. Moves within Australia to adapt and adopt the English 'Looking After Children' assessment and case planning system received some coverage. One frequently cited article by Howard Bath (1997) detailed trends in the out-of-home care of children in Australia. A variety of research featured in 1998 and one issue became a special Queensland edition.

Also in 1998 the La Trobe University publications committee provided some funds for development and support and a national editorial board was established. This has been maintained since with representatives from each State and Territory and some additional consultants. The advent of the International Foster Care Conference in Melbourne in 1999 provided an opportunity for many aspects of foster care to be reviewed. The final issue in that year provided the official record of the conference in an expanded edition. The decade had also seen the war in Bosnia and the crisis in East Timor which led to some comment about the way children become enmeshed in these events as soldiers, victims and refugees.

With the year 2000 we entered the new millennium with June Allan still on board as book review editor, some editorial assistance being provided by Dr Tony Lunken at La Trobe University and Lorraine Redshaw still working wonders at Oz Child. As the decade proceeds, contributors continue to report on innovations and promising prospects. The substantial thrust is apparent to incorporate more research into practice and an interesting example of the benefit of this is demonstrated in the cluster of activity in both Australia and overseas on leaving care. There now also appears to be a ready acceptance on the part of all spheres of government that prevention and early intervention is a worthwhile cause. The idea has been strengthened greatly in Australia by the advent of the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth. As the successful tenderer for a major longitudinal study now under way, this body will help this evidence to grow as well as adding important local detail to developmental understanding. Translating the idea of preventive work and early, appropriate and adequate intervention into service systems presents more of a challenge. A special edition of the journal was published in 2003 (Vol 28 No 2), edited by Frank Ainsworth and Judy Cashmore for the recently formed National Child and Family Welfare Research Alliance, with some pointers from contributors to where the field ought to go.

As the millennium moves on, inquiries at both Commonwealth and State and Territory levels have begun to reveal the extent of historical systemic abuse. The Care Leavers of Australia Network has succeeded in drawing attention to the lifelong consequences when abuse and neglect in care is added to abuse and neglect at home.

*Children Australia* in 2005 continues to find its contributors and readers still grappling with the challenges of children's rights, the structure of services, practice concerns and wicked problems like child protection, juvenile justice, out-of-home care and family support. It has witnessed over the years a massive movement from residential care to home-based care and continues to observe practitioners struggling with complex needs and risk related challenges. Organisations involved in the field, both government and non-government, often appear from where we sit, to be

bigger and glossier, but meaner, more risk averse and full of practice and programmatic limits and boundaries. We hear often about performance measures and quality assurance, but often wonder about the reality of standards and whether substantial inputs of resources actually deliver the quality time and skill needed for troubled children and families to heal and grow.

Debate still rages over how services should be structured and who should be responsible for financing them. Many practitioners are still bruised from experiments in privatisation, outsourcing and competitive tendering of child, youth and family welfare services. We have witnessed the events of September 11, some new wars, a border crisis and serious disagreements about Australia's treatment of asylum seekers.

In contrast to its beginning, *Children Australia* is now the product of a very small team of direct workers, including the welcome addition in 2005 of Dr Jennifer Lehmann as co-editor. Oz Child and occasionally La Trobe University continue to provide some financial aid. One of the challenges it faces in the explosion of the information age, and the proprietary claims over knowledge in a competitive world, is how best to communicate while still making ends meet. Hopefully, with the support of readers and contributors, the journal will continue to share good ideas and raise significant questions. ❖

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