

# **A Living Library Project**

## **History of Children's Services in the Western Region**

### **The Past, the Present and the Future**

A paper prepared for the Project Seminar  
May 1992 by Louise Glanville, Lecturer in  
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Children's Services in Melbourne's  
Western Region

The Past, the Present and the Future.

by Louise Glanville.

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## Introduction

This report was prepared by Louise Glanville for the May 1992 launch of the Living Library booklets and video on the History of Children's Services in the Western Region.

Louise has had many years involvement in community development in various municipalities in Melbourne's Western Region. In recent years she has been the Social Planner for the Western Region Commission. She is now a lecturer in Social Work at the Victoria University of Technology, Melton Campus.

Louise's document places the project material in its historic context enhancing its value as background material for planning for the twenty first century.

## INTRODUCTION

The history of children's services development in the west of Melbourne is one of ongoing challenges and constant change. It is a history which emphasises the pivotal role of women - both paid and unpaid - in establishing services at the local level, in grasping opportunities where they were perceived to exist and in striving to influence public policy at a state and federal level. This history also highlights the significance of regional organisations and processes and the primary role of local government in responding to community needs.

As part of the Crow Collection's project on children's services in the western region, funded by the Reichstein Foundation, this paper presents an overview of factors influencing the development of children's services in the west of Melbourne. It also identifies areas of challenge for the future.

The paper primarily focuses on developments in the field of children's services since the 1970s. By this time it had become clear that the family could no longer be viewed as a private unit, isolated from societal concern. Changes in family structure, member roles and attitudes; increased paid workforce participation by women; ethnic diversity and altering attitudes to disability, indicated that public policy initiatives were required which supported family units in their responsibilities relating to children. It is this environment of enhanced community consciousness concerning social issues with which we enter the 1970s.

## THE BROAD PICTURE.

### Child Care

While child care programs had moved from a philanthropic and charitable base in the 1900s - namely that of rescuing 'needy' children - to one of necessity in the 1940s and 1950s - as a result of women's participation in the workforce - it was not until 1972 and the advent of the *Child Care Act* that the Commonwealth assumed major responsibility for child care provision, including both capital and recurrent assistance to establish and maintain non-profit child care centres. This Commonwealth involvement was further developed as a result of reports of the Social Welfare Commission in 1975 which led to an expansion of the Children's Services Program to include family day care, out of school hours services and neighbourhood children's centres incorporating occasional care. The Social Welfare Commission also produced a national policy and blueprint for children's services based on planning in local government areas. However, this was never implemented in practice and the

associated Interim Children's Commission appointed in 1974 did not become permanent.

Since that time, the Commonwealth has progressively re-defined its objectives relating to child care with a focus on meeting the needs of working families and supporting labour market participation. Income related fee relief was introduced in 1984, while the late 1980s and early 1990s witnessed attempts by the Commonwealth to stimulate the supply of child care through subsidies and incentives to both employers and private investors, for example fee relief being extended to users of commercial child care centres in 1991.

Of particular significance in 1972 was the formation of community child care, the community based children's services movement. This organisation was to play a vital role in lobbying and advocacy activities at a state and federal level in the child care arena. It remains active today.

### **Pre-Schools**

In Victoria in the 1930s and 1940s the *Pre -School Child Act* provided staff salaries and building maintenance for the development of kindergartens. In this way state government encouraged local government to play an active part in the education of children.

In 1972, the Commonwealth made a commitment to provide one year of pre-school to all four year olds and allocated monies for this purpose. However, progressively from the late 1970s onwards, funding for pre-schools became the responsibility of the states with local government contributing substantially to both capital and recurrent costs.

It must be acknowledged that pre-schools continue to develop in significant part as a result of voluntary committees of management devoting time and money to this service type.

### **Other key contextual features relating to children's services.**

In addition to developments in the areas of child care and pre schools, maternal and child health centres are one of the core children's services programs that can be identified. On the whole these have remained free, non-stigmatised and universally available and are indicative of the significant role played by local government in the provision of children's services. Indeed, maternal and child health centres constitute the first municipal community service having their origins in the early 1900s.

Most importantly, it was the *Report of the Review of Early Childhood Services* undertaken by the Victorian State Government Committee in 1983 which outlined the roles and responsibilities of federal government, state government,

local government and community groups in relation to the planning and development of children's services. This Review Report also emphasised the goals and principles which should guide children's service development. Specifically these goals stated that:

Goal.1: Early childhood services should provide developmental opportunities for young children;

Goal.2: Early childhood services should provide resources and developmental opportunities for families;

Goal.3: Early childhood services should provide resources and opportunities for the development of informal and supportive networks in local communities.

The planning principles can be summarised as follows:

- \* Universal availability;
- \* Neighbourhood focus;
- \* Neighbourhood networking;
- \* Community participation and control;
- \* Worker participation;
- \* Equity in wages and working conditions;
- \* Integration;
- \* Cultural Relevance;
- \* Local planning and coordination.

These principles continue to have relevance today.

## **UNDERSTANDING DEVELOPMENTS IN THE WEST - SOME OBSERVATIONS.**

So, what of the west of Melbourne? Like other regions of Victoria it experienced a substantial growth in children's services from the 1970s onwards, the policy context of which in part is outlined above. This growth is currently apparent in the strong network of neighbourhood houses across the region, the increase in child care opportunities including family day care, long day care and occasional care, the existence of a children's services infrastructure in all municipalities in the west and the development of family support programs including family counselling, financial counselling and family aid programs.

In analysing children's service developments in the region, a number of key influences can be identified which serve to distinguish the experiences in the west.

### **(1) Role of Regional Organisations.**

In 1972, the Welfare Advisory Committee of the Western Suburbs Municipal Association ( now the Western Region Commission ) convened the *Deprived West Seminar* which led to the formation of the Western Region Council for Social Development. This was established as part of the federal government's Australian Assistance Plan. As a regional organisation the Western Region Council for Social Development played a vital role in developing human services across the west. In particular its employment of a regional children's services development officer assisted local governments to take up children's service opportunities. This regional intervention provided both practical support and encouragement to councils which had developed limited expertise and resources in the area of human services. Importantly, the Western Region Council for Social Development also facilitated the involvement of the union movement in children's services issues in the west.

### **(2) Role of Local Government.**

As a region, the west had little experience of voluntary sector human service provision or church networks in the field of children's services. This scenario placed councils in an ideal position to respond to the challenge of meeting the children's service needs of its local community. In most instances local government embraced the challenge and its associated opportunities fully, this establishing the pattern of active local government involvement which is now a feature of human service delivery in the West. This pattern is continually evidenced by local governments increasing dollar contribution to the provision of services. In the development of children's services , it would appear that the most proactive councils were those which had sympathetic officers and in particular some relevant infrastructure for example, a position of children's services development officer.

### **(3) Committed Women.**

Perhaps the most significant feature in the development of children's services in the west has been the commitment of women in both paid and unpaid capacities, to participate and improve conditions in the region. This involvement has been evident at all levels, in local community politics and in state and national campaigns and has been characterised by a desire to address and substantially change the image of the west as 'deprived'. Women have used this image to achieve a purpose, that of securing monies and 'locking -in' services.

#### **(4) Other Influences.**

Several other influences on the development of children's services in the west can be identified. These include the role of the regional office of Community Services Victoria which in the 1970s, took on many of the funding initiatives of the Australian Assistance Plan after its demise. Those initiatives relating to the children's services area tended to be absorbed into the departmental FACS program.

Mention must also be made of the role played by labor local councils in embracing their community service obligations in the area of children's services.

### **FUTURE CHALLENGES.**

While it is acknowledged that , in large part, children's services have been fought for and are here to stay, their shape and form will be subject to debate in the future.

Of critical importance is the issue of access to child care. The narrower targetting of child care towards labour market participation represents a clear shift from the concept of universality promoted in the 1970s. Who has access to child care and the associated element of its affordability is perhaps the key issue for this children's services area, affordability being partly affected by funding determinations of fee relief and operational subsidy. In the broadest sense the contribution of child care to the national, state and local economy is still to be fully recognised and acknowledged.

The notion of integrated services will also be high on the agenda. Such integration must address attitudinal, funding and industrial barriers and should seek to encourage a service type which is not singular in its focus but rather involves a networked system. This must be recognised as different from the notion of co-located services and is essential if problems of fragmentation are to be addressed. It will also assist in developing service structures which confront the social and economic realities of contemporary society.

Finally, children's services must be perceived as an integral part of the social infrastructure of any healthy community which purports to be supportive of its members.

Perhaps it is this which presents the greatest challenge.

Louise Glanville  
May, 1992.

## REFERENCES AND RESOURCES.

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Crow Collection Association  
Victoria University of Technology

Living Library Project on History of Children's Services

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Booklets Published as Background Material.

1. The History of the Carlton Refuge from 1850s to 1920  
First published 1920
2. Two Articles about Health of Women and Children :-  
"The Neglected Children's Aid Society"  
First published 1911  
and  
"The After Care Home and the District Nurses".  
First published 1925
3. Two Documents about Attitudes to Slums  
"Slum Babies and Slum Mothers"  
First published about 1914  
and  
"You can't lift every baby out of the slums  
The Slum Abolition Movement in the 1930s
4. History of Children's Services in Melbourne Municipality  
1910 to 1980
5. "Bread and Treacle Diet"  
Extracts from documents of the 1930s.
6. "Mothers must Work To Win"  
Photos and leaflets from the Brunswick Children's  
Centre, 1943.
7. "The Deprived West/ The Determined West" an extract from a  
report by Ruth and Maurie Crow, first published 1972.
8. Creating Community in the Neighbourhood - Neighbourhood  
Houses in the Western Region", transcript of a tape by  
Meredith Sussex, 1978.
9. History of the Tweddle Baby Hospital, by Kathleen  
Codogotto  
First published 1992
10. The past, present and future - Children's Services in the  
Western Region, a report by Louise Gianville, 1992
11. "Magic in the Lives of Children, Participation in the  
Lives of their Parents" report prepared by Christine  
Carolan and Sheila Byard, 1992.
12. Kit on Federal Funding of Children's Services.

### About the Project

The Lance Reichstein Charitable Foundation funded the Crow Collection for a Living Library Project on children's services in the Western Region.

A Project Steering Committee has assisted the project worker (Christine Carolan) who has worked with providers of children's services teachers and students in the Region.

The project resulted in the production of a video which includes information on the history of child care, a kit about the way children's services are funded, a series of booklets describing community movements which resulted in initiating some of the present children's services and a display of photos of some of the people who have helped to establish these services in Melbourne's Western Region

A seminar on May 22nd 1992 marked the end of this project but the video and publications can be used well into the future.

### About the Collection

Ruth Crow and her late husband, Maurie were involved in movements on urban issues from the mid 1930s. Over the years they built up an extensive collection of documents :- books, pamphlets, posters, photos and working papers.

In 1990 the Victoria University of Technology (Footscray Campus) invited Ruth to donate the collection to the VUT Library.

The Crow Collection includes documents written and/or used by groups and individuals committed to social change. This store of information from the past is being used to generate ideas about the future.

A Crow Collection Association has been formed and incorporated. One of its aims is to enhance the comprehensiveness and accessibility of the Collection through Living library Projects.



The Crow Collection

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