





#### **President's Report**

#### Dr Fiona McIntosh

Another year has passed in which International Social Service (ISS) Australia has continued to support families separated by international borders.

The 2018-19 financial year been quite a challenging year for our small but dedicated team, all who persevere in an increasingly financially constrained environment yet conduct their work with both dignity and empathy.

Our Service Managers in particular, deserve to be recognised for their leadership and commitment – this including Rebecca Chapman, Helen Freris, Kay Hardefeldt and Damon Martin, supported by Fionn Skiotis as Executive Director.

The governance of ISS Australia continued to mature due to the commitment, expertise and objectivity of our volunteer Board Members and the introduction of new governance mechanisms and tools.

I'd like to thank Freia Carlton (Vice-President) and Richard Giles (Treasurer) for their support and also extend a warm thanks to the remaining Board Members for their collegiality and commitment to ISS Australia.



### **Interim Executive Director's Report**

#### Damon Martin

The 2018-19 financial year was another busy year, with International Social Service (ISS) Australia meeting the niche demand for cross-border casework services in Australia.

This is to be expected with global migration patterns continuing to increase and one in four Australians being born overseas. ISS Australia assisted more than 1,000 individuals in 2018-19, providing invaluable support to families in Australia affected by child abduction, adoption, child welfare and many other cross border issues

In 2018 -19 ISS Australia won the tender to deliver the NSW Government funded Special Search Service and began operating its first largely domestic service.

Sadly, our partnership with LifeWorks in the delivery of the Intercountry Adoption Family Support Service ended in June 2019. However, ISS Australia remains committed to Australian intercountry adoptees and will continue to advocate so they have access to specialised and professional support services.

ISS Australia remains a proud member of the global child protection and social service ISS network that functions in over 140 countries and we are committed to responding to the needs of vulnerable cross border children and families.

I would like to sincerely thank the ISS Australia Board of Directors as well as the students on placement and volunteers.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the dedication and passion of my ISS Australia colleagues who are highly committed to providing quality services and achieving outcomes for our clients. On behalf of all the children and families we help, thank you.

# WHAT DOES ISS AUSTRALIA DO?

ISS Australia is an independent, Australian, not-for-proft organisation registered with the Australian Charities and Not-for-proft Commission (ACNC).

We provide specialised, professional, cross-border casework services, that is, assistance from social workers, lawyers and mediators to families and children in Australia who are separated by international borders.

With almost 60 years experience, ISS Australia is a leader in its areas of expertise and the only Australian Non Government Organisation (NGO) focused closely on intercountry casework and related services.

ISS Australia is a member of the global ISS network, established in 1924 and now represented in more than 140 countries worldwide. The ISS network assists over 50,000 families each year.

ISS Australia's network membership provides the unique capacity to refer cases to qualifed and experienced colleagues in most countries, confident that our clients' issues will receive fast, high quality and caring responses.

Our services focus on the care, protection and support of children and families separated across international borders.

#### They include:

- International parental child abduction
  - social work support
- legal assistance
- · International family mediation
- · International post adoption tracing
- General family tracing and reunificationIntercountry adoption family support
- Intercountry child welfare and kinship care

All our services are provided by qualifed and accredited social workers, lawyers and mediators, experienced in working across international borders. In addition to our services, ISS Australia also engages in research, advocacy, policy development and training in areas relevant to our mission, when resources allow.



2018-19 Service Data

#### **SERVICE AREAS / NEW CASES**

23

International Parental
Child Abduction (IPCA)
Social Work

152

International Parental
Child Abduction (IPCA)
Legal

21

International Family Mediation

2

International
Family Tracing and
Reunification

58

International Child Welfare and Kinship Assessment 44

Intercountry Adoption Family Support Services (ICAFSS)

54

International Post Adoption Tracing Service (IPATS)

43

NSW Special Search Service

## IN 2018-19 ISS AUSTRALIA

397 NEW CASES HANDLED OVER 8000 ENQUIRIES

**Introducing Our New Service** 

#### NSW SPECIAL SEARCH SERVICE

...never in my wildest dreams did I think I would get this opportunity.
 I am so appreciative of the efforts of ISS Australia."

In September 2018, ISS Australia was successful in winning the NSW Government tender to deliver the NSW Special Search Service. The NSW Special Search Service, previously delivered by the Salvation Army since 1998, provides free and specialised search and reunion services to people who were separated by NSW Government intervention. This includes separation through adoption, being under the care of the Minister, foster care, or being placed in a children's home.

The NSW Special Search Service is the first largely domestic service to be delivered by ISS Australia, however our experience in post adoption search and reunion is extensive and the service complements our NSW Government funded International Post Adoption Tracing Service.

In the inaugural year of delivering the NSW Special Search Service, we have expanded our searching techniques. We now have online access to restricted NSW Births Deaths and Marriages records through the LifeSearch database. We have already produced many profound and even life changing outcomes for our clients, by locating family members in 13 of our cases in this initial year.

I was at the point of giving up [...] then my ISS Australia Social Worker came along, we aved her magic and came up with results that I never thought I'd see. Words can't explain how thankful I am..."

Special Search Service client

ISS Australia has also developed a NSW Special Search Service Advisory Group that meets quarterly to enhance best practice and seek advice from the broad range of interested members.

The current contract for the delivery of the NSW Special Search Service runs until June 2021, allowing ISS Australia the time to continue enhancing best practice in tracing and reunion casework, while achieving many positive outcomes and potential family reunions. ISS Australia also plans to develop a concise and user friendly 'Search Guide' to assist people separated by adoption and state intervention.

### LEGAL SERVICE AND THE ALIENATED CHILD

SS Australia's Legal Service provides specialist legal advice in relation to international parental child abduction (IPCA) in Australia. Our Legal Service maintains a toll-free national IPCA Advice Line where comprehensive legal advice or follow up support from our Social Work Support Service is provided to each client, depending on their circumstances.

Where legal remedies are available, our Legal Service is able prepare applications under the 1980 Hague Convention or Australia's Bilateral Agreements with Lebanon and Egypt for a child's return to Australia, or to facilitate a parent's access to their child.

work of ISS Australia.

Between 16 and 18 August 2018, the
Australian Association of Family and
Conciliation Courts (AFCC) hosted their fifth annual
conference in Adelaide with the theme of alienation,
myths, complexities and possibilities. Staff from the
ISS Australia's Legal Service, including Rebecca
Chapman (Managing Lawyer), Jenny Tam (Senior
Lawyer), Christina Scibilia (Lawyer), Meilisa Southwick
(Paralegal) and Emily Biggs (Paralegal), joined
specialists from around Australia to discuss a breadth
of family law topics highly relevant to the mission and

The conference was well attended by judges, Central Authority representatives, legal professionals, academics, mediators, and mental health professionals – all of whom work within the 1980 Hague Convention sphere.

Several presentations debated the virtue of affording children the opportunity to be heard in IPCA court proceedings. Presently, the 1980 Hague Convention states that a court may refuse to order the return of a child if the child objects to being returned (and the child has reached an age and degree of maturity where it would be appropriate to take into account their views). Academics explained when and how children were engaged in these matters, and if this affected the court proceedings. The Honorable Diana Bryant, formerly Chief Justice of the Family Court of Australia, highlighted the need to protect children from further

parental conflict.

The concept of alienation remains a controversial topic, with concerns raised about the potential consequences on a child's mental health, upbringing and future relationship with their parents. This is highly relevant in Hague matters encountered by the ISS Australia's Legal Service, usually when a parent has been accused of stripping a child from their familial connections and separating them from

giving the child a voice, but not a choice" [...] would protect them from further parental conflict.

another primary parent.
Throughout the conference,
mental health professionals
provided workshops to look at
appropriate responses to cases
where children have resisted
contact with a parent following
an abduction.

Overall, the conference was a valuable experience for engaging in interdisciplinary and cross-jurisdictional discussion. It also provided ISS Australia with opportunities to exchange knowledge and form new networks that may benefit families and children across the world.

Jenny Tam Senior Lawyer

#### **International Kinship Care Service**

### INTERNATIONAL KINSHIP CARE IS IN THE BEST INTERESTS OF CHILDREN IN CARE

n June 2018, there were more than 45,800 children in out-of-home care in Australia. Almost half of these children were being cared for by people with whom they had no family or friend connection.

When a child cannot be cared for by their parents, the preferred means of care should be with the extended family and other people with a family connection. This principle is in-line with a child's right to preserve his or her identity and to be provided with appropriate alternative care. These rights are enshrined in the United Nations (UN) Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children (2009) and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 3, Article 8, and Article 20). These principles apply, even when a child's extended family members are residing in another country.

International mobility is ever increasing and almost half of Australia's population are either born overseas or have at least one parent born overseas. There is little doubt that immediate and extended families are increasingly dispersed across two or more different countries.

Unfortunately, there is no data available specifying how many children currently living in out-of-home care have family members residing overseas who could provide care to them, though we suspect this would be a significant number. The potential to provide permanent, safe, and stable care to children within their kinship network is unchartered; international borders should not be a barrier for kinship care and this is an issue we aim to overcome.

ISS Australia works in several areas to protect, defend, and support the best interests and rights of children and families separated by international borders. A significant service provided by ISS Australia is facilitating international kinship placements, both outgoing and incoming. Thanks to our membership in the worldwide ISS network, we utilise our partner organisations in the relevant country to carry out local assessments of family members of children in Australia

requiring kinship care. When the request is incoming, we are often able to complete the assessments ourselves as all our staff are experienced and skilled in this area. If it is not cost-effective for our staff to do the assessments (due to location) we source local, highly experienced social workers to do the work. We ensure that all assessments, both in Australia and overseas, are of a standard acceptable to the Australian expectations.

ISS Australia encourages Child Protection authorities to always consider international kinship care for children who have family residing overseas, despite the challenges in arranging this.

We have successfully helped many children with overseas family and are proud of our work assisting vulnerable children to feel loved and secure. We have also built strong ties with overseas Child Protection authorities to ensure that children coming from these countries find happiness and safety with their families in Australia.



No barrier should be insurmountable when trying to protect children and ensure they grow up as best they can. At ISS Australia, we continue growing our international kinship care service and we know that goes on to reach and transform the lives of many more vulnerable children around the world.

Kay Hardefeldt ISS Australia's Manager, NSW Services

## A BETTER FUTURE IS POSSIBLE

## IMPROVING THE LIVES OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES LIVING IN INSTITUTIONS IN CAMBODIA

Damon Martin, ISS Australia's Interim Executive Director, continues to implement this UNICEF Cambodia funded project. Started in 2016, the project aims to enhance alternative care opportunities for children with disabilities living in institutions.

In July 2018, ISS Australia signed our largest UNICEF agreement which contained seven specific activities.

One activity of particular interest was a Study Tour to explore good practices for family support, family-based care and Small Group Homes for children with disabilities in Hong Kong. In December 2018, we organised and facilitated the Study Tour along with our ISS Hong Kong colleague, Martin Lau. The Study Tour delegation was led by His Excellency Sem Sokha, Secretary of State, Cambodian Government's Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation, along with a number of senior Cambodian Government officials and representatives from UNICEF Cambodia and Damnok Toek (a Cambodian NGO).

The Study Tour delegates visited seven NGOs in Hong Kong, where they learnt promising practices and identified models that could be replicated in Cambodia.

Admittedly, the economic context in Hong Kong is very different to Cambodia, the biggest difference being the Hong Kong Government's ability to contract and fund NGOs to provide services for children with disabilities, a financial position the Cambodian Government would have to work towards. However, the Cambodian Government should firstly aim to replicate the Hong Kong Government's 'Central Referral System', that monitors and records the needs and development of every child in alternative care.

The Hong Kong model for Small Group Homes for children with disabilities could also provide 'family-like' environments for children in Cambodia where foster placements cannot be obtained.

Despite the differences within the two countries contexts, the delegates were able to develop a comprehensive report with nine specific recommendations to improve alternative care practices for children with disabilities in Cambodia.

A Better Future is Possible is a global ISS project supporting children with disabilities in Cambodia, Vietnam, Mauritius, Burkina Faso and Mexico. We are keen to scale our model, and impact, to countries around the globe because we believe that many children with disabilities residing in institutions should have the opportunity to live in family environments.



#### **Our People**

#### **PATRON**



The Hon Alastair Nicholson AO RFD QC

Former Chief Justice of the Family Court of Australia; Chair, Children's Rights International

### **BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

Dr. Fiona McIntosh - President

Freia Carlton - Vice President

Richard Giles – Treasurer

Peter Arnaudo

Rebecca Cowan

Deborah Fry

Mary Griffin

Barbara Lane

#### STAFF

#### **Victorian Office**

Fionn Skiotis – Executive Director

Ann Freilich – Accountant

Kate Fisher – Business Development Manager (to April 2019)

Meilisa Southwick – Office Manager / Paralegal (to May 2019)

Helen Freris – National Services Manager / Manager, International Family Mediation Service

Eleni Bailey – Intercountry Social Worker / International Family Mediator

Aga Duc – Intercountry Social Worker

Amelia McDermott – Intercountry Social Worker / ICA Information and Support Social Worker

Lizzie Gray – Special Search Service Social Worker

Jenny Tam – Senior Lawyer

Christina Scibilia – Lawver

Rebekah Bessant – Lawye

Emily Biggs - Paralegal

#### Brisbane

Melissa Hanning – ICA Information and Support Caseworker

#### Adelaide

Sandi Petersen – ICA Information and Support Caseworker

Su Park – ICA Tracing Social Worker

#### **NSW Office**

Damon Martin – Manager, ICA Service / Manager, NSW Office / Manager, NSW Specia Search Service

Kay Hardefeldt – Manager, NSW Services / International Family Mediator

Rebecca Chapman – Managing Lawyer

Dian Neligan – Lawyer (to April 2019)

Ben Hughes – Lawyer

Phoebe Lewis – Senior Social Worker

Janet Henegan – ICA
Information and Support Social
Worker

Phoebe Peters – Intercountry
Social Worker / Special Search
Service Social Worker

Meredith Gantt – Intercountry Social Worker

#### Perth

Melanie Boulton – ICA Information and Suppor Caseworker

#### **Students and Volunteers**

Katie Langmore (Social Work Student)

Ashley Robinson (Lega Volunteer)

Jacky Wong (Legal Volunteer

Nell Gordan (Legal Volunteer

Mikaelewa Amberber (Research Volunteer)

Vanessa Langenberg (Volunteer)

Lizie Davey (Google Ads Volunteer)



### CONFERENCES AND PRESENTATIONS

ISS Australia staff presented at the following:

- International Conference on Adoption Research (ICAR) 6, Montreal, Canada, July 2018
   Damon Martin – Poster Presentation
- Relationships Australia, Alice Springs, July 2018 – Rebecca Chapman – Online Presenter
- Family Law Pathways
   Network, Northern Territory,
   August 2018 Rebecca
   Chapman Online Presenter
- International Family
   Mediation, Hague Workshop,
   Adelaide, August 2018 Kay
   Hardefeldt Presenter.
- Australasian Post Adoption Meeting, Brisbane, October 2018 – Damon Martin – Presenter
- National Permanency Conference, Brisbane, November 2018 – Damon Martin – Panel Participant
- FACS Western Sydney Nepean Blue Mountains District Information Day, October 2018 – Kay Hardefeldt – Presenter
- Safe Home for Life Forum,
   Sydney, December 2018 –
   Kay Hardefeldt Presenter
- FACS SSESNS District
   Combined Managers Meeting,
   Sydney, February 2018 Kay
   Hardefeldt Presenter
- FACS Lakemba CSC Unit Meeting, Sydney, May 2019 – Kay Hardefeldt – Presenter
- FACS South Western Sydney Combined Managers Meeting, Sydney, May 2019 – Kay Hardefeldt – Presenter
- International Social Service (ISS) Case Coordinators Meeting, Berlin, Germany, April 2019 – Kay Hardefeldt – Presenter



#### **Staff Spotlight**

## PHOEBE PETERS Intercountry Social Worker NSW Office

I joined ISS Australia as an Office Administrator in 2013 while I was studying Social Work at university. At that time, my responsibilities were the day-to-day running of the office and providing administrative support. From the start, I was thrilled to be working for an international organisation with social work at its core and saw potential for career progression.

#### Being a part of a person's healing [...] is a privilege that few can say is their job"

In 2014, I was promoted to Social Work Assistant. I became involved in client work and was moved into the Social Workers' area of the office. I learned through observation and involvement in casework. I was able to exercise social work skills learned at university and build on my communication skills. Through casework with the global ISS network, it allowed me to work and collaborate with colleagues from all over the world.

Working in the field whilst studying had many benefits. I completed a student placement with ISS Australia, where I was mentored by experienced Intercountry Social Workers. ISS Australia also offered flexibility and support, which enabled me to excel in my studies whilst working.

I have a lot of passion for ISS Australia's post adoption casework which is challenging and rewarding. Over time, I have developed an understanding of the trauma, grief and loss that can accompany adoption. Being a part of a person's healing, or of aiding the piecing together of their identity, is a privilege that few can say is their job. It is always an honour to share in someone's journey towards connecting with their biological roots.

In 2018 as a newly qualified Social Worker I became a member of ISS Australia's newest service, the NSW Special Search Service. This work is interesting and stimulating and has strengthened my knowledge of trauma-informed practice. It has also been a highlight of my time at ISS Australia to be involved in the evolution of a new service.

My journey at ISS Australia has been most enjoyable due to the unique work and the great workers within the organisation. I foresee a bright future for my career with ISS Australia, as well as the organisation as a whole.

#### **Phoebe Peters**

#### **Volunteer Spotlight**

## **ASHLEY ROBINSON Legal Assistant**

Volunteering with ISS Australia has provided me with ample opportunities to develop my legal skills during my studies. I began volunteering with the Legal Service of ISS Australia in August 2018. Since then I have been mentored on practical legal skills and encouraged to develop my professional experience. Volunteering with ISS Australia has proven to be a fantastic way for me to connect with social justice and international law while I complete my studies.

As a penultimate student studying a Bachelor of Laws and a Bachelor of Criminology, I have found my volunteering experience to be of immense benefit. Having the opportunity to be mentored by the Legal Service, primarily by the Managing Lawyer Rebecca Chapman, I have developed practical skills which relate to my legal studies. My involvement with matters at ISS Australia has brought my university studies out of the textbook and into the real world. I am able to understand the what, whys, and hows of legal matters and see the principles we explore in the classroom being used practically before my eyes.

## Through the support and guidance of ISS Australia, I have gained the confidence to explore my passions"

I believe that volunteering here has allowed for more than just the development of practical skills. The staff of both the Legal Services and the Social Work teams have given me a platform to develop many soft skills which have positively impacted my professional and personal development. Through the support and guidance of ISS Australia, I have gained the confidence to explore my passions within social justice and the law. Since I began volunteering at ISS Australia, I have attended the United Nations in Bangkok on multiple occasions for training on international relations, diplomacy and access to justice and have since become a Humanitarian Affairs Peace Ambassador, Further to this, I have been able to explore issues related to developments in international alternative dispute resolutions and technology in the Hague and present a research piece on intergenerational trauma and community-centred peacebuilding in Rome.

I feel privileged to volunteer with ISS Australia and am continually inspired by the staff of both the Legal Services and Social Work teams.

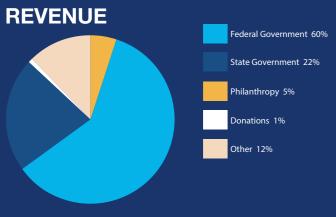
#### **Ashley Robinson**

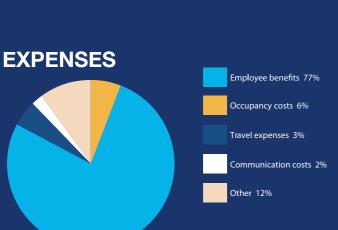


#### **Financial Snapshot**

#### **OPERATING RESULT**







#### **FINANCIAL POSITION**

Assets	
Current Assets	\$396,10
Non-current assets	\$1,507,4 <sup>-</sup>
Total assets	\$1,903,52
Liabilities	
Current liabilities	\$344,60
Total liabilities	\$344,63
Net assets	\$1,558,88
Accumulated surplus/(deficit)	\$(142,81
Reserves	\$1,701,69
Equity	\$1,558,88

#### Support ISS Australia

#### **Donate**

Even the smallest donations can change the lives of the children and families in need of our services.

Donations can be for any amount, one off or recurring.

Visit our website or call 1300 657 843 to make a dontation.

Donations over \$2 are tax deductible.

#### Become a member

Anyone can become a member of ISS Australia for a small fee. By doing so you will help strengthen the organisation, learn about our outstanding work and have the right to vote at all General Meetings and provide input on our future direction.

#### Leave a bequest

Make your legacy one that will forever change the lives of children and families separated across international borders. To discuss your bequest options in complete confidence please call us on 03 9614 8755.

### Tell a colleague, friend and family member

Do you know someone who might be interested in ISS Australia's work, assisting children and families across international borders? Please let them know about us – they may wish to donate, volunteer or simply sign up to our newsletter to learn more.

#### Connect with us





#### **Get involved**

#### Sign up to our newsletter

Our newsletter is published on a regular basis and will keep you up-to-date with the latest news on ISS Australia's services, events, research and publications, as well as developments in our sector and some inspiring case studies.

#### **Volunteer with us**

ISS Australia welcomes volunteers in all our service areas, as well as fundraising and business development, media and communication, marketing and administration. Our supportive, friendly teams and comprehensive induction and training ensure volunteers gain great experience while with us.

#### Intern with us

ISS Australia also welcomes students from a wide range of disciplines including social work, law, media and communication, marketing and international studies.

Please contact us about interning as part of your studies.

#### **Acknowledgements**

ISS Australia gratefully acknowledges the support and involvement of the following funders, donors and partners:

#### Government and Other Funding Bodies

- Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department
- Commonwealth Department of Social Services
- NSW Department of Communities and Justice
- UNICEF Cambodia

#### Philanthropic Foundations and Trusts

The RE Ross Trust

#### **Partners**

- LifeWorks Relationship Counselling and Education Services
- SPOON Foundation (Portland, Oregon)
- Victorian Assisted Reproductive Treatment Authority (VARTA)
- The Benevolent Society
- AdoptChange
- · Herbert Smith Freehills
- Melinda Samson, Click-Winning Content
- Helen McLean, McLean Multimedia



Hello... I am writing to thank your organisation and especially [my lawyer] for helping me get my daughter back...

Thank you for the kindness you showed me during a very difficult period of my life, thank you for working tirelessly for weeks on end to make sure all my documents, affidavits were correct and on point.

Thank you from the bottom of my heart."

From a client who was separated from her daughter for many months. ISS Australia's Social Work Service helped her to find stable accommodation and our Legal Service assisted with the court documents.

## THANK YOU FROM THE BOTTOM OF MY HEART

I am fortunate to have been provided assistance from International Social Service (ISS) Australia since September 2016. My situation is related to a complex, international custody issue pertaining to my young daughter, an Australian citizen who has moved multiple times between Australia, India and the United States and has again recently moved overseas to India.

ISS Australia has been quickly able to provide practical and realistic advice and follow through with actions to guide me on next steps. This includes excellent, independent legal advice such as helping to file a Hague Convention case on November 2018 in the United States (which successfully resulted in my daughter being returned to Australia), mediation and dispute resolution services. This amazing level of support has been facilitated through a high level of social worker engagement over a sustained 3-year period, even when I was overseas in India under difficult and emotionally trying circumstances attempting to resolve legal and visitation issues locally. The ongoing social work support at this time was essentially life-saving.

ISS Australia has also been able to provide me with multiple contacts as part of their ISS partner network including a social worker in India who provided me with a thorough knowledge of the local customs and laws."

From a long-term ISS Australia client who received support from ISS Australia's Social Work and Legal Services.

My family and I would like to thank ISS Australia for all your time and effort into finding details of my mother and brother. We are so impressed with the professionalism and dedication involved for our long-awaited search which would not have been accomplished without your help. Unfortunately, I discovered that my mother had passed away several years ago but I now have had the opportunity to have contact with my half-brother and that would not have happened if not for the continued research that was completed discreetly and successfully.

I would highly recommend ISS
Australia to anyone wishing to find
family members all over the world.
It has been a highly successful and
emotional journey for me and my
family."

From a client who accessed ISS Australia's International Post Adoption Tracing Service.

#### **VICTORIAN OFFICE**

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Defending children · connecting families · across the world