

Annual Report 2022-23



Supporting Children • Connecting Families • Across the World



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Child Safety Statement

ISS Australia is absolutely committed to the safety of children. We have in place policies to develop and foster an organisational culture of child safety and provide assurance regarding recognising and reporting any child abuse. All ISS Australia staff, volunteers, students and interns are required to have a working with children check. For further information on our more detailed child safety policy contact ISS Australia.

Acknowledgement of Country

ISS Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners and pay our respect to Elders past present and emerging of the land on which our NSW Office stands, the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation. We also wish to acknowledge the Traditional Owners and pay our respects to the Elders past, present and emerging of the land on which our Victoria Office stands; the Boon Wurrung and Woiwurrung (Wurundjeri) peoples of the Kulin Nation. We also offer this respect to the Traditional Owners of the land throughout Australia. ISS Australia acknowledges the importance that connection to land and culture has to identity and the wellbeing of children, families and communities.

Who we are



ISS Australia is a leading agency in Australia providing social work, legal and family mediation services.

We are a national not-for-profit service provider and registered as a charity with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC).



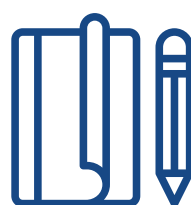
What we do

ISS Australia provides intercountry social work, legal and mediation services supporting children and families separated by international borders. We do this with around 130 International Social Service network partners around the world.



Why we exist

ISS Australia believes children and families should be connected wherever they are in the world. **We believe that everyone needs to belong and know who they are.**



Our services and international focus

- International parental child abduction legal and social work service
- international child welfare and kinship care
- international post adoption tracing and reunification
- international family mediation and child consultation
- NSW Special Search Service
- international family tracing and reunification





President's Report

Dr Fiona McIntosh



It gives me great pleasure to report on behalf of the ISS Australia Board of Directors on another successful year at ISS Australia. ISS Australia has come out of the global COVID19 Pandemic in a strong position operationally and we maintain the depth and breadth of our core social work, legal and family mediation services across borders.

The board has had another busy year with the finalisation of selling ISS Australia's Flinders Lane property (which in the post-pandemic period was no longer serving our best interests) and reinvesting the proceeds into a suitable investment vehicle. This has given ISS Australia more contingency and flexibility and more certainty into the future around our financial position. Thanks to our CEO, Peter van Vliet, and our Treasurer, Richard Giles, for leading this piece of work successfully with our Board.

Working with management we have also approved and established a strengthened stand-alone International Family Mediation service as well as supporting the finalisation of planning around a new counselling service, both of which are planned to operate on a modest fee-for-service basis. These services will compliment our existing International Parental Child Abduction legal and social work services and our international child protection services which are funded by government.

At the end of the financial year the board finalised a significant piece of work around improving the employee value proposition at ISS Australia after this area was identified as one needing improvement. This was a complex piece of work around strengthened employee benefits and staff engagement and I am pleased that ISS Australia now offers a more attractive proposition for our staff in this area.

Another pleasing development over the last few months has been the establishment of a closer working relationship, through an exchange of letters, with Child

Rights International, an Australian based non-government organisation, headed by the Honourable Jennifer Coate AO. Our two organisations share similar goals and values and the partnership can only benefit us and our clients.

As always, I would like to thank our terrific staff for their hard work and dedication to assisting children and families across borders. Our staff are the lifeblood of our organisation and our professional social workers, lawyers and mediators give their all to assisting our clients who are often in the most complex and difficult of circumstances.

I give special mention to our management team, Damon Martin, Kay Hardefeldt, Jessica Raffal, Ann Freilich and our CEO, Peter van Vliet, for their hard work. I would also like to thank Damon Martin who acted as CEO for part of 2022 while Peter served briefly in Canberra.

Finally, I would like to thank the dedicated and committee individuals who form our board for their hard work in governing our organisation effectively. I would also like to pay tribute to Rebecca Cowan, Executive Director of the Good Friday Appeal, who left the board in July 2023 after five years of invaluable service.

Next year in October ISS celebrates its 100th birthday as the organisation was formed in 1924 in Geneva, Switzerland. ISS is now a truly international network with members in around 130 countries providing vital international services to children and families across borders. I look forward to the opportunity of celebrating with you all next year.

CEO's Report

Peter van Vliet



It's been another busy year at ISS Australia, as the world has emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic and international travel and movement began to return to normal levels. ISS Australia's key services continue to be delivered in a highly professional way and our clients continue to give us excellent survey results which is not surprising given the incredible depth and experience of our frontline staff.

I would like to thank Damon Martin, our Deputy CEO, who acted as CEO while I was working briefly in Canberra in the first quarter of the financial year. Our management team continues to drive excellence at ISS Australia and I also give particular thanks to our new Managing Lawyer, Jessica Raffal, our Social Work Manager, Kay Hardefeldt, and again Damon Martin for his key role in managing our NSW government funded services and also for his significant contribution to the ISS network internationally.

Special thanks also to Eleni Bailey who acted as Manager Social Work and International Family Mediation, while Kay Hardefeldt was on parental leave. Eleni Bailey has now moved on to coordinating our new stand-alone International Family Mediation Service and is driving continued improvement and growth in that space. Ann Freilich has also continued to provide excellent accounting services during a challenging period financially.

Our caseload continues to be busy and last but not least I have to thank our highly talented and committed social work, legal and mediation staff who perform their critical work in assisting children and families across borders every day. While many of their stories and successes cannot be publicly shared because they are so deeply personal – I can attest that the work they do is simply incredible, often very moving in terms of outcomes and of course critical to our client's well-being. Thank you all!

A priority in 2022-23 was in growing our organisation and we focused on expanding our service offer in two areas: International Family Mediation; and Counselling. Feray Ergun and then Eleni Bailey have been critical in establishing our new stand-alone International Family Mediation service, building on the great work of Kay Hardefeldt earlier.

ISS Australia now offers a comprehensive, stand-alone International Family Mediation service, including legally assisted mediation when required, and focusing on the best interests of the child. International Family Mediation

can be a valuable alternative to lengthy and costly court proceedings and is an important tool in resolving international parenting arrangements.

We were privileged to have her Honour, Justice Victoria Bennett AO, speak at the relaunch of our International Family Mediation service earlier this year. I would also particularly like to thank the Felton Bequest and Equity Trustees for their continued invaluable support of our IFM service.

Our new counselling service is close to being finalised following Board approval and thanks to Lizzie Gray for the invaluable work she has done setting up the service model and implementing the training required to launch this new service.

With regards to ISS Australia's core funded services in international parental child abduction (legal and social work); international child protection; special search; and post adoption tracing services, ISS Australia continues to provide a high level of service to our clients through our professional staff again with excellent client survey results. We particularly thank the Commonwealth and New South Wales Governments for their on-going invaluable support of ISS Australia here.

ISS Australia's staff and our board President had the opportunity to meet in February, 2023, and set some important markers for the year ahead. After the challenging years of COVID lockdowns it was wonderful to meet in-person and build trust, cohesion and sense of purpose in the team. Of particular note was staff and board interest in improving the employee value proposition at ISS Australia, which lead to further staff and board consultations and a significantly improved staff benefits package for ISS Australia employees. I thank staff and the board for their valuable contribution here and we are all pleased ISS Australia has strengthened its support for staff and is now more competitive against industry standards regarding employee benefits.

The February conference also looked at staff well-being and vicarious trauma which will continue to be a focus as we come out of the pandemic and deal with some of the mental health challenges stemming from that period. Our style of work has clearly changed following the pandemic with greater flexibility which is of great benefit to staff and particularly for those with caring responsibilities. ISS Australia has embraced this change while also seeking new ways of keeping our teams, who are now spread across all of Australia's major cities, connected and engaged.

ISS Australia continues to strengthen our governance frameworks and more recently we have strengthened our policies around preventing sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse (SHEA) to be at the forefront of international standards in this area, noting our particular role in supporting, sometimes vulnerable, children and families.

ISS Australia continues to contribute to our international network and has assisted in developing policies internationally in areas like international kinship care and family violence across borders. We value highly our role in the international network and the benefits it brings for our cross-border clients which is our unique proposition. We thank in particular our General Secretary, Jean Ayoub, and our partner agencies around the world for the cooperative and reciprocal dealings that underpin the mission of our network globally.

We remain active and engaged in policies around our work in areas like international kinship care, family violence across borders, and assistance and greater recognition and support for intercountry adoptees. We congratulate governments on continuing to drive reforms in these areas noting there is always more to be done.

I wanted to also thank some individuals who have assisted ISS Australia this year including: our very own Ambassador Felicity Gerry KC who has driven strong relations with the Deakin University law school Australia and ISS Australia; Maurice Edwards has been very active with us in leading our commercial partnership with Kate Rafton and the team at Rafton Family Lawyers; Jennifer Coate AO who has played an active role presenting to our organisation and also strengthening the engagement between ISS Australia and

Children's Rights International; and K&L Gates Lawyers have also provided invaluable pro-bono legal assistance to ISS Australia over the past year. I would also like to congratulate Jacqueline Pascarl OAM who joined the ISS (International) Governing Board this year and brings her great knowledge and experience in our operating areas to this role. I would also like to thank Breanna Worthington who continues to provide invaluable and highly skilled voluntary support to ISS Australia in the marketing and promotions area. Thank you all!

I would like to thank our former employees who have moved on recently including just recently one of our longest serving and leading social workers, Phoebe Lewis, earlier two of our leading lawyers Belinda Li and Jenny Tam, and also the talented Feray Ergun who has worked with the organisation twice over several decades. Thank you all for your contribution and thanks also to others who have moved through the organisation in recent years.

Last of all I would like to thank the ISS Australia Board for their work in ensuring our organisation is properly governed and maintains a strong strategic focus. In particular I would like to thank our Board executive, being our President, Dr Fiona McIntosh, our Deputy President, Nina Brooks, and our Treasurer, Richard Giles, who have all done an incredible job and given away countless hours of their personal time in supporting our organisation. Their smooth handling of a major asset sale and the further reinvestment will ensure ISS Australia has financial certainty in the decades to come and is to be applauded.

ISS Australia looks forward to the years ahead as we continue to meet the challenges and opportunities confronting us. As the organisation approaches 100 years internationally next year it gives us time to pause and reflect that we are all just individuals moving through the organisation and contributing to its greater purpose. I think in particular of two former stalwarts and leaders of ISS Australia, David Cox AO and Merle Mitchell OAM, who both passed away in recent times. Vale! We remain absolutely committed to supporting children and families across borders and continuing to strengthen and grow our mission and role in this area.

We have implemented our Reconciliation Action Plan and remain committed to reconciliation and supporting first Australians and their enduring sovereignty which has never ceased and was never ceded.

We have participated in cultural studies, taken staff on walking tours on country, purchased indigenous art, consolidated our protocols around indigenous recognition, held staff discussion around the Voice, and we have used indigenous owned organisations in our purchasing decisions including in the printing of this annual report through IndigiPrint.

We remain absolutely committed to reconciliation and continuing our reconciliation journey with Reconciliation Australia.

Our Impact

2022-23 ISS Australia Data Set

In 2022-23 ISS Australia worked extensively on



483 cases

International
Child Welfare and
Kinship Care

85

77

International Post
Adoption Tracing
Services



69

International Parental Child
Abduction Legal

133

International
Parental Child
Abduction
Social Work

NSW
Special
Search
Service

64

47

International
Family
Mediation

General Family
Tracing and
Reunification

8

We also handled **1040 inquiries** where advice was given without case management.



International Parental Child Abduction Service

Service Annual Report

The International Parental Child Abduction (IPCA) Service has 29 years of experience in supporting families affected by International Parental Child Abduction. It comprises Legal and Social Support Services that work together to provide wraparound support to clients experiencing IPCA.

This collaborative practice ensures that clients' legal, emotional and practical needs are met during an extraordinarily challenging and traumatic period.

The IPCA service draws upon its extensive experience in this highly specialised practice area to deliver high quality casework services, diverse and engaging community education. There is also expert consultation to professional organisations and associations and the development of highly valuable and accessible resources on all aspects of IPCA.

Casework Services

The IPCA Service provides accessible support for individuals, families, and professionals through our national telephone helpline, strong web presence, and integrated referral and booking systems. The IPCA service is highly responsive; clients can receive rapid advice or assistance, often on the same day in urgent cases, ensuring that stress and further complications can be minimised.

In 2023, the IPCA Service provided support to **202 case files** and **634 inquiries** involving children taken to more than **125 different countries**.

The overwhelming majority of case files involved cases in which children had been abducted outside of Australia by a parent. Most Legal cases involved submitting applications for the return of those children under the 1980 Hague Convention. Most Social Support cases involved intensive counselling, case management, and referrals to local and international support services. When a risk of harm to self or others is identified, the Social Support Service worked in parallel with the legal process to address safety concerns.

The countries most represented in IPCA cases and inquiries were New Zealand, the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, India, Lebanon and Germany.

The Legal Service finalised **69 case files** and provided advice or limited assistance in an additional **439 matters**. The Social Support Service provided support in **133 case files** and

advice or limited assistance in an additional **195 matters**.

The IPCA Service has unique access to the **ISS global network**, spanning over **140 different countries**. This places the IPCA Service in a strong position to support families affected by IPCA in both 1980 Hague and Non-Hague convention countries. Using the ISS global network, the IPCA service can provide cross-border case management and referrals to facilitate access to critical support for children and parents in Australia and abroad.

In 2023, referral and case management with overseas ISS network members **involved at least 80 internationally abducted children**. Further, our cross-border case management and referrals have worked to;

- Ensure safety by making overseas child protection reports, requesting health and welfare checks, and providing referrals to support services
- Reduce parental conflict by providing practical and emotional support and helping parents focus on the needs of their children
- Reduce the negative impacts of IPCA by opening international communication channels between parents and their children

Service User Feedback

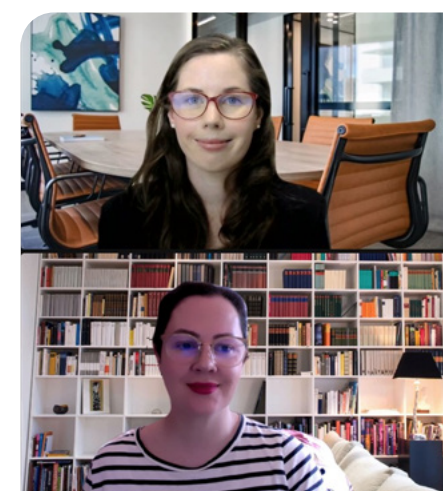
"[My Social Worker] has been awesome all this time, more than a year, she has been my main support since I don't have family in Australia."

"Overall, my experience with ISS Australia has been excellent. Everybody I have spoken to has been very helpful and professional."

"I have had an awesome experience with [my Social Worker]. It's hard when you can't see your kid like me. She shows amazing empathy, great advice, some resources and just understanding. Very nice person."

"[My Social Worker] was amazing. So supportive and perceptive. I felt like I didn't have to explain my situation too much for her to get an understanding of what I have been going through."

"I found [my Social Worker] to be excellent! Empathetic, efficient and great to deal with. I would highly recommend ISS as the service I have received was next level. Thank you so much for your support."



The 1980 Hague Convention is in force between Australia and the following countries:

Albania	Canada	Fiji	Israel	Montenegro	Romania	Thailand
Argentina	Chile	Finland	Italy	Netherlands	Saint Kitts and Nevis	Trinidad & Tobago
Armenia	Colombia	France	Japan	New Zealand	San Marino	Turkey
Austria	Costa Rica	Georgia	Latvia	Nicaragua	Serbia	Turkmenistan
Bahamas	Croatia	Germany	Lithuania	North Macedonia (FYROM)	Singapore	Ukraine
Belarus	Cyprus	Greece	Luxembourg	Norway	Slovakia	United Kingdom
Belgium	Czech Republic	Guatemala	Macao (China)	Panama	Slovenia	United States of America
Belize	Denmark	Honduras	Malta	Paraguay	South Africa	Uruguay
Bosnia & Herzegovina	Dominican Republic	Hong Kong (China)	Mauritius	Peru	Spain	Uzbekistan
Brazil	Ecuador	Hungary	Mexico	Poland	Sri Lanka	Venezuela
Bulgaria	El Salvador	Iceland	Moldova, Republic of	Portugal	Sweden	Zimbabwe
Burkina Faso	Estonia	Ireland	Monaco	Republic of Korea	Switzerland	

The following countries have acceded to the 1980 Hague Convention but Australia has not accepted that accession:

Andorra	Kazakhstan
Barbados	Lesotho
Bolivia	Morocco
Cuba	Pakistan
Gabon	Philippines
Guinea	Russia
Guyana	Seychelles
Iraq	Tunisia
Jamaica	Zambia

This means you cannot make an application under 1980 HC for the return of, or access to, children located in these countries.

"If I didn't have [my Social Worker], I would not be coping at the moment. She has gone above and beyond with helping me and for that I am so grateful."

"Outstanding [my Social Worker] has never left me waiting for an answer if I have asked a question and the level of personal care and involvement has blown me away."

"[My Social Worker] is wonderful. She has been supportive, caring, kind, friendly, approachable, and I wouldn't have got as far in my case without her."

"[My Social Worker] has been, and is being, an incredible help to me in establishing a connection with my long estranged teenage daughter. Her support and advice is invaluable to me."

"I found the whole experience of working with the ISS lawyers very professional although a very stressful time I commented on a number of occasions about how personal my case felt not just to me but a genuine care from my lawyer a very human factor if that makes sense. Outside of the laws that where being advised when I got upset crying at times I was never made to feel silly or feel rushed like I was an inconvenience. For the whole experience I felt in good hands and would like to say thank you so much for helping me."

"I can't thank Charissa enough, her service has been amazing, she has provided me with everything needed for my case. Charissa also explains things in a way I understand. Although my matter has not been finalized yet overseas I feel confident in what we have presented and Charissa has gone above and beyond to help me with everything. With out her I would be lost with all of this."

Community Engagement

Over the past year, the ISS Australia IPCA team has delivered community education sessions to a huge range of audiences, including:

- Western Australian Law Society
- Legal Services Commission of South Australia
- Federation of Community Legal Centres Victoria
- Department of Justice and Community Safety
- Berry Street Victoria
- Community Legal Western Australia

Australian Central Authority

- Seated within Commonwealth AGD
- Responsible for administration of 1980 Hague Convention
- Assesses outgoing applications for return and access under the Convention and provides case management.
- Possible to make a Hague application directly in the courts of some overseas jurisdictions - check HCCH country profiles
- Using the ACA pathway will generally be preferable



The IPCA team consistently receives wonderful feedback from these sessions, and continues to receive requests for future sessions:

"Great presentation, thanks!"

"Thanks, it was a really helpful session to better understand the IPCA process and the type of assistance that ISS can provide so that we can better advise clients."

"Great depth of knowledge and clearly spoken by the presenters."

"Please conduct more sessions!"

NSW Government Funded Services



Intercountry Casework Project:

The ISS Australia Intercountry Casework Project assists Australian Child Protection Authorities and Out-of-Home Care providers with the international element of their casework. This includes providing thorough background checks of prospective carers, exploration and facilitation of family connections and conducting assessments of extended family placement options overseas.

There are over 46,000 children in Out-of-Home care in Australia, and almost half of these children are cared for by people whom they are not related to. When a child cannot be cared for by their parents, the preferred means of care should be within their extended family (provided it is safe to do so), regardless of whether the extended family resides overseas. Exploration of family placements both locally and overseas provide the best opportunity for a child to be raised with a strong sense of identity, belonging, roots and culture.

An [International Kinship Care video](#) developed by ISS Australia in 2022 has been a powerful resource in influencing child protection caseworkers about this important and viable alternative care option for children in care. The International Social Service global network of members in 132 countries can help Child Protection Authorities fully explore overseas family and kinship placement options when a child can no longer be cared for by their parents.

International Post Adoption Tracing Service (IPATS):

IPATS provides free tracing and reunion support to NSW residents who have been separated by adoption, and where one party is thought to be overseas. The majority of our cases involve searching in the UK and New Zealand, which highlights the widespread past adoption practices in Britain and the Commonwealth, as well as the significant English and New Zealand population in Australia. Similarly, many of our clients were adopted in Australia and are searching for family members overseas which is evidence of Australia's diverse and multicultural population.

On 21 March 2023, Damon Martin presented at the Rafton Family Lawyers Reflections in Law Conference in Orange. The session was titled 'Adoption, Surrogacy and Immigration – Modern Families in the Land Downunder'. Damon discussed Australia's previous shameful adoption history which was characterised by secrecy and the 'clean-break theory'. Damon presented on how practice has evolved over time to embrace the spirit of openness. Coincidentally, the presentation occurred on the 10th Anniversary of the Federal Apology for Forced Adoption practices. ISS Australia supports clients impacted by former forced adoption practices, many of whom endure a lifetime struggle with trauma, guilt, attachment and identity issues.

NSW Special Search Service:

In 2023, ISS Australia's NSW Special Search Service completed its fifth year of achieving life-changing outcomes for our clients. The service provides free and specialised search and reunion services to people separated by NSW Government intervention. In 2022 – 23, 78% of our cases related to searches for people affected by adoption, while 22% related to Care Leavers (such as children who were placed in institutional and other forms of Out-of-Home Care). Our 63% success rate of locating and reuniting family members demonstrates our extensive search skills and ability to achieve great outcomes for our clients. Undoubtedly our greatest search tool is our access to LifeSearch, an online database of NSW Births Deaths and Marriages (BDM) records.

ISS Australia gratefully acknowledges the continued funding and support from the NSW Government's Department of Communities and Justice for our Intercountry Casework Project, IPATS and NSW Special Search Service.



Left to Right: Presenters of the Rafton Family Lawyers Reflections in Law Conference, Damon Martin – ISS Australia, Joel de Carteret – Filipino intercountry adoptee, Wajih Ahmed – Buttar, Caldwell and Co. Solicitors, Maurice Edwards – Rafton Family Lawyers.

Farewell Phoebe Lewis

In late 2023 we farewellled Phoebe Lewis. Since commencing her Intercountry Social Worker role at ISS Australia in January 2012, Phoebe then became our Senior Social Worker, obtained a mediation qualification and became an experienced mediator. She also became a Child Consultant and developed a range of tools, resources and training for our kinship carers on understanding attachment, trauma and parenting. ISS Australia will greatly miss Phoebe's skill and expertise, commitment to clients, insight and overall her great collegial support.

Staff Spotlight 2023

Charissa Chong



I started as a Lawyer in the legal service at ISS Australia in September 2022, and was appointed as Senior Lawyer in July 2023.

Prior to ISS, I began my career at Women's Legal Service NSW where I gained in-depth experience working primarily with women experiencing family violence and adult survivors of child sexual abuse. Later on, I ran the Health Justice Partnership between Inner Melbourne Community Legal and two adjacent tertiary hospitals - seeing patients at the hospitals and advising on a wide range of legal issues. From this work, I learnt how to work with people through some of the most traumatic times of their lives. It is, and continues to be, a privilege to earn a client's trust and be able to make a positive difference in their life.

The legal service at ISS is a community legal centre ('CLC'), albeit a specialist nationwide one. It has always been my first choice to work in CLCs. One value embodied by CLCs that I feel particularly strongly about is access to justice - anyone, regardless of background or socio-economic status should have access to high quality legal advice and assistance. At ISS, we strive to provide this every day.

I was drawn to the role at ISS for two reasons. First, I was certain that the complex, transnational nature of the work would be interesting (and it is!); and second, I valued the opportunity to be able to work collaboratively with the social work team. Coming onboard ISS, in many ways, felt like coming home, especially after the extended time away from work I had taken to raise my young family. It was a challenging period of transition, but my manager and senior staff were nothing but supportive and I quickly felt part of the ISS Australia family. I cannot overstate how instrumental the support from both my workplace and my family were in giving me the confidence to thrive in this new phase of my life.

A typical day at ISS includes advising new clients who contact us for legal advice and working on active casework. Clients come to us in all situations related to international parental child abduction ('IPCA'). Most often we speak to a parent whose child has been wrongfully removed to or retained in an overseas country; but we also advise parents who are contemplating removal, preventing removal, or affected in some other way by IPCA. In terms of active casework, we most commonly assist parents in Australia with making return or access applications under the 1980 Hague Convention with respect to their children who are overseas. This involves preparing an application and an affidavit in support of that application. The affidavit is a comprehensive document that tells the court the client's story, and a well-drafted affidavit is imperative to any application. A love of drafting and the skills to accompany it are a must in this role.

One of my favourite parts of active casework, however, is

the opportunity to connect and learn from lawyers around the world, specifically in the overseas countries where the applications we prepare are filed in. Applications under the 1980 Hague Convention can be procedurally complex, passing through multiple hands (lawyers and the Central Authorities) before being filed in the overseas country. Once filed overseas, lawyers in the overseas country are often appointed to represent the client. As the legal service at ISS Australia is the first point of contact in the client's journey, it is common for the overseas lawyer to liaise with us about the client's case. For the overseas lawyer, they often want more information about the client's circumstances and how Australian law would operate in certain aspects of the client's case. In turn, it is a chance for us to learn how return cases are advanced specifically in the overseas country, what Hague judges in that country look out for, and the kind of orders the overseas court is likely to make in such applications. This process differs to some extent for every single country that is a signatory to the 1980 Hague Convention and it has been a fascinating journey to learn these differences.

It is truly special to be a part of this ISS Australia legal team. We are altogether six lawyers and paralegals spread across Australia, but we have managed to make working together in a virtual office productive and enjoyable. A highlight of our time together in the last year though has been the time spent together in-person as a team - first, at the Staff Day in February 2023 in Melbourne, and then in March 2023 when the lawyers attended the CLC Conference in Hobart. The Staff Day was a great morale booster - a chance for the whole organisation to come together and build bonds, learn, and grow together towards a common vision. Likewise, the CLC Conference in Hobart was just fantastic! It was wonderful to be surrounded by like-minded practitioners from all areas of law coming together to share our experiences and learn from one another. And lastly, but most importantly, it was a chance for the lawyers in our legal team to cement the bonds between us, to grow that relationship of trust and respect deeper; and be a team that can work well together, have each other's backs, and fearlessly ask and learn from one another.

I have been fortunate to enjoy my career thus far. I have worked in centres and with people whom I have great respect for and in return have learnt much. My journey of learning continues, but I also take great joy in passing on the skills I have learned, and knowledge acquired. I am so happy to be a part of the ISS family and I look forward to what the future brings for us.

International Family Mediation



International Social Service Australia's International Family Mediation (IFM) service has grown from strength to strength and continues to provide much needed support to families facing high-conflict cross-border parenting disputes.

The IFM service was launched as a stand-alone service on the 26th July 2023 at a memorable celebration in Melbourne. The Honourable Justice Victoria Jane Bennett AO was the guest speaker at the auspicious event. Our ISS Australia president Dr Fiona McIntosh and our CEO Peter van Vliet also spoke about the important service our Attorney General's Department accredited Family Dispute Resolution Practitioners provide to families around the world.

While ISS Australia has been providing IFM services for over 10 years, since 2012 it has always been an add-on to our other core services, provided by ISS Australia staff who have other roles within the organisation. Recognising both the past support from and now the generous further assistance of the Alfred Felton Bequest philanthropic funding in Victoria ISS Australia can now provide a dedicated IFM service. Ms Eleni Bailey as the IFM coordinator will manage the growth and development of the IFM service and with assistance from other accredited mediators facilitate mediation services across borders.

The ISS Australia IFM team carries out detailed risk assessments, pre-mediation screening interviews, determine suitability for family dispute resolution, and co-mediate family dispute resolution mediations where appropriate. The IFM team have also been trained in legally assisted mediations and where suitable, are now able to facilitate legally assisted mediations, always focusing on the developmental needs and welfare of the children. ISS Australia provides IFM for matters under the the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction (1980) as well as for people wishing to resolve international parenting arrangements more generally. As per the Hague Guide to Good Practice on International mediations neutrality, impartiality, fairness guide our approach and does the best interests of the child, and incorporating the child's voice wherever appropriate guide our practice.

Our IFM service continues to facilitate productive discussions among separated families, focusing on the needs, welfare, and arrangements for their children. We firmly believe that creating a safe place, establishing respectful communication

guidelines, and fostering open dialogue and mutual understanding, can pave the way for sustainable and amicable solutions.

What distinguishes our IFM service from others is our participation in the extensive International Social Service (ISS) network. This network has members in over 130 countries which enables us to make timely child protection notifications where appropriate, managing risk and ensuring the safety and wellbeing of the children involved. Furthermore, we recognise the importance of providing in country support to the overseas parents who may be facing challenges and need additional referrals. Our international reach allows us to offer comprehensive assistance to these parents, ensuring they have access to the resources they need.

We firmly believe that every family deserves a chance to find common ground and build a brighter future, regardless of the geographical boundaries that may exist. The launch of our IFM service underscores our dedication to this belief and our determination to make a positive impact on families' lives.

Our [IFM website](#) has undergone a makeover with the addition of a **frequently asked questions drop down menu**, **process tiles outlining step by step the mediation process**, a **statistic snapshot**, and **testimonials**.



Above: The Honourable Justice Victoria Jane Bennett AO was the guest speaker at the IFM launch event in Melbourne.



Above: The Honourable Justice Victoria Jane Bennett AO receiving flowers from ISS Governing Board Member, Jacqueline Pascarl OAM, with ISS Australia CEO Mr Peter van Vliet at the IFM launch event.



Above: Ms Jenny Tam, Ms Jessica Raffal, Ms Feray Ergun, Ms Belinda Li, and Ms Ann Freilich (at the IFM launch event from left to right).



Above: ISS Australia's CEO Mr Peter van Vliet speaking at the launch of the IFM service event in Melbourne.



Above: ISS Australia president Dr Fiona McIntosh speaking at the IFM launch event in Melbourne.

Central Coast Family Law Pathway Network Steering Committee:

Our Senior Social Worker, International Family Mediation coordinator and Child Consultant, Eleni Bailey is continuing to play an active role on the Central Coast Family Law Pathway network Steering Committee. Meeting face to face in July 2023 for a productive planning day the Steering Committee plans the exciting events, educational webinars, guest speakers and members meetings for the year, ensuring professionals in the Central Coast of NSW have access to networking opportunities, high quality professional development and education throughout the year.

Right: (Top Row) Kate Packer, Jonathon Wenman, Lina Nguyen, Alicia McAleer, Sue Winter, Belinda Harris (Bottom Row) Sarah Samild, Eleni Bailey, Michayla Simpson. Absent: Jacqui Bilson



FRSA conference:

Eleni Bailey, coordinator of the International Family Mediation Service and Senior Social Worker had the opportunity to attend the annual Family and Relationship Services Australia (FRSA) National Conference at the Gold Coast Convention and Exhibition Centre. The conference was held on the lands of the people of the Yugambah language region in May 2023. The theme of the conference was 'Services within everyone's reach: choice, connection, collaboration'. It is one of the largest annual gatherings of family relationship practitioners, academics and policy makers collaborating and discussing how to best support children, families and communities around Australia. This year there were 550 delegates!

The conference was an educational and engaging way to hear a diverse range of presentations on key issues impacting children and families across Australia. Presentations included information about legally assisted family dispute resolution models (which ISS Australia also offers in our IFM service), the importance of supporting children in the crucial first 1000 days of a child's life, and ways of assisting clients experiencing coercive controlling violence. There were over 70 presentations in total! It was a wonderful opportunity to network with professionals, spread the news about ISS Australia's support services to practitioners far and wide, and to keep up to date with recent research, practice learnings and insights.



Above: Anne Hollonds, National Children's Commission leading a panel discussion 'The Early Years: giving every child the best start in life' at the 2023 FRSA conference.



Above: Anne Hollonds, National Children's Commission leading a panel discussion 'The Early Years: giving every child the best start in life' at the 2023 FRSA conference.



Above: The Honourable Amanda Rishworth MP, Minister for Social Services presenting to delegates at the 2023 FRSA conference.

Our People

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Chair, Children's Rights International

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Ra Chapman

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Damon Martin - Deputy CEO / Manager NSW Services (Acting CEO mid-2022)

Phoebe Lewis - Senior Social Worker

Lizzie Gray - Senior Social Worker

Phoebe Peters - Intercountry Social Worker

Meredith Gantt - Intercountry Social Worker

International Parental Child Abduction

Kay Hardefeldt – Manager

Feray Ergun – Senior Social Worker (until July 2023)

Amelia McDermott – Senior Social Worker

Zanna Moran - Social Worker (until June 2023)

International Parental Child Abduction Legal Service

Jessica Raffal – Managing Lawyer

Charissa Chong – Senior Lawyer

Emily Biggs – Lawyer

Erika Orenstein – Lawyer

Zoe Patterson Ross – Paralegal

Matt Georgevits - Paralegal

Belinda Li – Lawyer/Managing Lawyer (until February 2023)

Jenny Tam – Senior Lawyer (until August 2022)

Monique Angeleri – Paralegal (until October 2022)

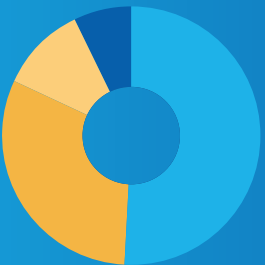
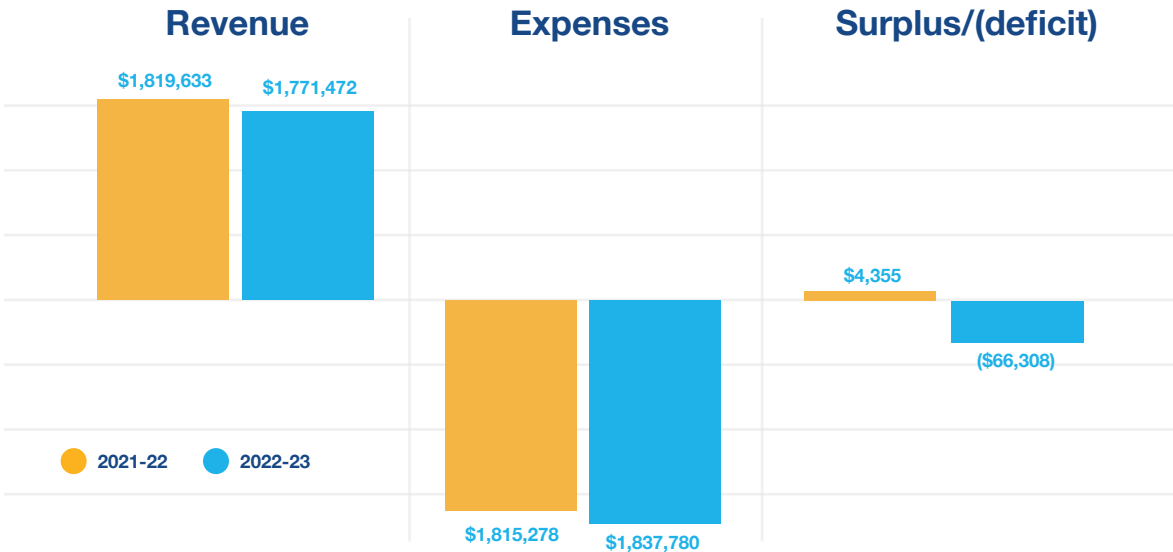
International Family Mediation

Eleni Bailey – International Family Mediation Coordinator
(Acting Manager IPCA Social Work to May 2023)

Kathleen Lambeth (Family Mediator)

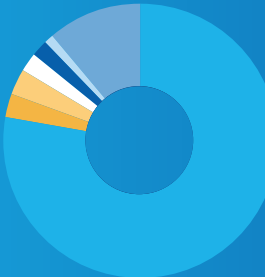
Financial Report

ISS Australia Financial Snapshot 2022-23 operating results



Revenue 2022-23

- Federal Government grants 51%
- State Government grants 31%
- Philanthropy and Donations 11%
- Fee for Services 7%
- Other 0%



Expenses 2022-23

- Employee Benefits 76%
- Occupancy costs 3%
- Depreciation 3%
- Amortisation – Right of use 2%
- Professional Development 2%
- Communication costs 1%
- Other 14%

Financial Position at 30 June 2023

ASSETS	
Current Assets	\$2,736,046
Non-Current Assets	\$13,563
Total Assets	\$2,749,609
LIABILITIES	
Current Liabilities	\$535,434
Non-Current Liabilities	-
Total Liabilities	\$535,434
NET ASSETS	
Accumulated Surplus/(Deficit)	\$243,396
Reserves	\$1,970,779
Total Equity	\$2,214,175

Support ISS Australia

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

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Rafton Family Lawyers are ISS Australia's exclusive gold sponsor.



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Commonwealth Attorney General's Department
NSW Department of Communities and Justice
UNICEF Cambodia Philanthropic

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Community Legal Centres Australia
Deakin University
Inter Country Adoptee Voices
K&L Gates Legal Services
Nicholes Family Law
VANISH
VARTA (Victorian Assisted Reproductive Treatment Authority)

Finally, we would like to acknowledge our wider ISS global network partners, including our General Secretariat in Switzerland, who contribute so much to our work and to improving the lives of children and families separated by borders.

Donate

ISS Australia relies on the generous donations of individuals to support our work with children and families separated by international borders.

Donations over \$2 are tax deductible. Visit our website or call 1300 657 843 to make a donation.

Leave a bequest

Make your legacy on that help change the lives of children and families separated by borders. Call 03 9614 8755 to discuss your bequest options in complete confidence.

Get involved

Follow us on social media. Become a member to help shape our organisation. Sign up to our quarterly newsletter. Volunteer for our marketing and fundraising or policy subcommittee. Apply to be an intern if you come from the social work, law, media and communications, marketing or international studies disciplines.

Connect with us

ISSAustralia
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Client Feedback

“

I found the whole experience of working with the ISS lawyers very professional...I commented on a number of occasions about how personal my case felt not just to me but a genuine care from my lawyer a very human factor...For the whole experience I felt in good hands.”

“

The service [NSW Special Search Service] is outstanding.”

“

My [IPCA social worker] was amazing. So supportive and perceptive. I felt like I didn't have to explain my situation too much for her to get an understanding of what I have been going through.”

“

Both of the social workers were very sympathetic and gave fantastic advice. They were very helpful in my difficult journey this past year.”

“

My lawyer was very professional and understanding of my situation and supported me during a very difficult time. She has helped me to have my family back together. I really appreciate her help and support.”

“

I'm extremely happy with the respect, service, and support from ISS Australia. I couldn't have asked for a better outcome.”

“

Appreciate the guidance and support given by ISS Australia to navigate a very difficult overseas matter.”

“

This was a complex referral involving a number of countries to request background checks. The time from referral to finalising the requests was extensive however understandable when relying on other services to respond. The communication and responses directly from the ISS Australia Social Worker were prompt, respectful and helpful.”

“

Really glad you exist.”

An article from ISS Australia's Exclusive Gold Sponsor, Rafton Family Lawyers

By Maurice Edwards, Special Counsel at RFL



The proposed amendments to the family law act 1975 and the impact on relocation cases.

The Family Law Amendment Bill 2023 currently before Parliament proposes a number of changes to the Family Law Act 1975 and parenting arrangements for children.

The significant amendments proposed involve repealing the presumption that it is in the best interests of the child for the child's parents to have equal shared parental responsibility and also the related provisions requiring the Court to consider the time parents spend with their children, including equal time and substantial and significant time. If the proposed changes become law the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia would still be able to make Orders for equal shared parental responsibility and equal time but the presumption would be removed.

The draft Bill provides different factors to be taken into account when assessing the best interests of a child. Currently, a Court must consider a number of factors including two (2) primary considerations and thirteen (13) additional considerations. The Bill proposes five “simplified” factors for the Court to consider when assessing the best interest of a child in addition to a “catch all” factor. There is an additional best interest factor proposed for an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child, that recognises the importance of a child staying connected with the child's culture, family, community, country and language.

Amendments also seek to codify the rule in the case of Rice & Asplund that final parenting orders remain in force unless the Court has considered whether there has been a significant change in circumstances since those final parenting orders.

The changes would empower the Court to make a “harmful proceedings order” prohibiting a party from instituting proceedings against the other party without leave of the Court.

Finally the Bill will make it a requirement, except in particular or exceptional circumstances, for Independent Children's Lawyers (ICLs) to meet with a child to make sure the child's views are considered. It also proposes removing the current requirement that ICLs are only appointed in exceptional circumstances in “Hague Child Abduction” matters.

Assuming these proposed amendments become law one might ask what are the implications for relocation matters?

After the Family Law Act 1975 came into effect in January 1976 the law regarding relocation was that the primary carer of the child was allowed to move freely, subject to what was in the best interest of the child. If there were valid reasons for the primary carer to relocate to another town, city or state, then provided that was also in the best interests of the child, the relocation request was ordered.

The decisions of the Court with regard to relocations changed significantly after the 2006 amendments to the Family Law Act, which introduced the presumption of equal shared parental responsibility, coupled with one of the primary considerations for best interests being that the child maintain a meaningful relationship with both parents.

For a number of years after the implementation of the Family Law Amendment (Shared Parental Responsibility) Act 2006 applications for relocation of a child to the Court were significantly more difficult as a result of those amendments in 2006 and Orders for Sole Parental Responsibility were not the norm.

However in the last few years we have seen Judges less reluctant to make Orders for Sole Parental Responsibility, particularly in circumstances where there is high conflict between parents or significant issues with parents communicating. We have also seen a recent trend to allow a child to relocate with the child's primary carer to cities, states and even countries if it is also in the best interest of the child. The advances in technology allowing parents and a child to communicate more easily by Zoom and the Whatsapp and the various other social media platforms that are available has shifted the Court outcomes in favour of relocation.

The current proposed amendments to the Family Law Act, would appear to enhance this recent trend in favour of granting relocations if the best interests of the child can also be satisfied.

We will probably not get back to the law as it was in the late 1970's & 1980's where there was liberal freedom of movement of a child with the child's primary carer, but certainly these proposed amendments, if made law, would be a further retreat from the relocation decisions made 10-15 years ago and reflect more closely those made 25-30 years ago. As they say sometimes what is old is new again.

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