

# THE VICTORIAN ASSOCIATION OF DAY NURSERIES - HISTORY

In 1907 the five Creches operating in Melbourne's inner suburbs combined to provide a working model of a Creche as part of a "Women's Exhibition". They won the Lady Northcote prize of 25 pounds. Six years later, Lady Northcote chaired the first annual meeting of the Association of Creches. Mrs Alfred Deakin was President and nine creches were represented. They were, in order of opening:

Collingwood	1886
Prahran	1890
Richmond	1891
Brunswick	1895
Fitzroy	1899
Carlton	1900
North Melbourne	1903
South Melbourne	1910
City (Ethel Nilsen)	1916

During the First World War, Ballarat Creche opened, and attempts were made to establish other Creches in Port Melbourne, St Kilda and Footscray. By the late 1920s both Footscray and Northcote Day Nurseries were operating in buildings given, or rented, to them by their respective local Councils.

After the Second World War plans for the future included a trained Kindergarten Teacher for every Creche, a Social Worker and a Supervisor to advise, co-ordinate and assist children, parents, staff and committees and the establishment of residential or 24 hour services for children whose mothers were ill, hospitalised or shift workers.

In 1946 the first Social Worker was employed, and by 1948, when standards for Creches were set and the name changed to Victorian Association of Day Nurseries, the only dream not realised was a Kindergarten Teacher in every Creche.

During the 1950s, the Nurseries helped train Child care personnel, the funding was increased by the change to a per capita system and another Nursery opened—Ascot, in the Royal Agricultural Showgrounds. In 1957 a small furnished house in Dromana was donated to the Association. It was used to give a fortnight's holiday to an average of 25 families every year. The house was named "Charong" in memory of Rev. Dr Charles Strong, founder of Collingwood Creche.

Between 1962 and 1968, the State Health Department subsidised the salary of the Social Worker, which was a great relief. This yearly grant of \$1,200 eased the Nurseries' finances a little and allowed them to plan for future liabilities such as Long Service Leave. At this time, the subscription paid to V.A.D.N. by each member Nursery was \$15.00 per child per year.

There were approximately 500 full time child care places in V.A.D.N. Nurseries after the opening of Geelong in 1967 and C.A.R.E. Broadmeadows in 1971.

Buildings in urgent need of repair, aging committees and financial constraints caused some of the Foundation Creches to hand over the management to Local Government—Prahran 1948, North Melbourne, City (Ethel Nilsen), South Melbourne in the 1950's and Collingwood in 1973.

## FUNDING

In February 1943, the Association of Creches received a letter from the Federal Director General of Man-Power notifying them that the care of children was a reserved occupation, that all Creches came under the heading of essential services and the staff could not leave without permission. The following month the Minutes record a "Miss C. Duncan from the Federal Health Department attended the Committee meeting to explain to them the government's proposal to assist mothers who do war service work with the care of their children by subsidising the Creches." It was proposed to start with Brunswick, Fitzroy and Footscray. There were some anxious moments concerning the funding and in May—"the President told each Creche not to commit themselves to further expense until assured the money would be paid." The first cheque did arrive in June and this enabled renovations to be completed and more trained staff to be employed. However trained staff proved difficult to get but "Miss Paul of the Free Kindergartens had partly trained girls for 30/- a week." Meanwhile the women of the Creche committees busied themselves obtaining extra coupons for butter, sugar and anything else they could get hold of. More importantly, they stepped up their efforts to get a Grant from the Dunstan State government.

Prior to the State Budget of 1944 lobbying was intense. Many of the women on the Creche committees had 'good contacts' in all three levels of government and used those contacts to very good effect. They were overjoyed when the Budget allocated three thousand pounds to be divided between the eleven creches. Leaflets were printed and no opportunity for publicity was missed. The money was received in March 1945 and, even though every year it had to be lobbied for anew, it was an enormous relief to the voluntary committees. Federal funding ended at the end of the war and did not begin again until 1972.

In 1948 the VADN administrative office was set up to co-ordinate the eleven centres. The staff consisted of Mrs Ethel Gedye, the Organising Secretary, the Supervisor of Creches and two Social Workers. The workload was considerable and included negotiating compensation insurance for all staff and Public Liability insurance for everyone involved whether voluntary or paid, courses of lectures for the staff, radio broadcasts as well as other speaking engagements, fund-raising appeals and giving advice to many organisations on how to establish a child care facility. In addition all parent interviews, enrolments, fee assessments and counselling took place at the office.

The financial situation of all creches not sponsored by Local Government was desperate in 1970 and several were in danger of closing. Wide media coverage resulted in valuable publicity and the Premier, Sir Henry Bolte, gave the assurance that no Creche would be closed. A report was compiled, and by 1971 a new funding formula was introduced giving 80% of the salaries of the approved staff for an adult child ratio set by the Conditions of Subsidy. In fact, the number of staff "approved" for subsidy purposes set only a minimum standard. It was not adequate, and all Nurseries continued to employ extra staff, without subsidy, in order to maintain former standards.

In 1991 State funding was reduced to a per child operational subsidy. Fee relief for users of our child care services is available from the Federal Government. These changes resulted in fee increases at most centres.

Written in 1992 for the final Annual Report of the VADN by the Administrative Officer, Rosemary Waite.

*Rosemary Waite*

# TO BEGIN AT THE BEGINNING . . .

The Collingwood Creche began in 1886 and creches at Prahran, Richmond and Brunswick soon followed, those Committees being advised by the Reverend Doctor Charles Strong and his wife who funded the Collingwood nursery. By 1907 there were six creches, all funded and managed by voluntary committees of women and staffed by a Matron, domestics and volunteers. Those committees formed the Association of Creches for mutual support, fund raising and sharing of ideas. At this same time the Free Kindergarten Union was founded and many of the same women were active in both organisations. Indeed when the first government grant was given to the FKU in 1910, one condition was that, where possible, Kindergartens should be established in or near Creches.

Today, integrated services or a "seamless" system is the talk of the town! It may surprise some people to learn that Creche, Kindergarten and Baby Health Centre were all together in one complex in Northcote and Footscray in the 1920's. The names of those pioneers of the services for children and families are still to be found. . . Annie Dennis, . . . Lady Northcote, . . . Lady Huntingfield and the Countess of Hopetoun. . .

Many of the pioneers remain unknown or are remembered only by the Centres for whom they worked so hard. I know many of the Nurseries have photographs and plaques in their memory. This was truly a case of women working for other women. We all know about the larger philanthropic movements, but this was the smaller, practical assistance, that women are so good at. And they were very good managers for almost fifty years without any government assistance at all. Many did receive a little assistance from Local government however.

Then came the second World War. In February 1943 the Association of Creches received a letter from the Federal Director General of Manpower notifying them that the care of children was a reserved occupation, that all Creches would now come under the heading of essential services and the staff could not leave without permission. The following month a Miss C. Duncan from the Federal Health department attended the Association meeting to explain to them how the government planned to assist women to do war service work. Women were needed to replace men away at the war and to work in the munitions factories and the factories making uniforms for the armed forces. The plan was to set up three Creches (at first) as Wartime Children's Centres and they were Brunswick, Fitzroy and Footscray. There were anxious moments. Funds were slow to arrive. The May minutes record the President telling every Creche not to commit themselves to any more expense until assured the money would be paid! All was well. The first cheque arrived in June and the renovations could be completed and more trained staff employed. However trained staff proved difficult to get and the next month's minutes say that "Miss Paul of the Free Kindergartens will supply partly trained girls for 30 shillings a week". That is the same "Muffie" Paul whose portrait graces the FKA Boardroom today.

The Wartime Centres were open 24 hours because of course the factories worked around the clock. Women with one child under two were given priority but I have not been able to establish why this was so. Perhaps the Government thought they would get good value from their money from such women because, with their husband away at war and busy working all hours of the day and night, they would have no time for activities likely to lead to more babies!

The added benefits of a government subsidy were very obvious to the other Creche committees and so they began the concerted effort to get a Grant from the State government. This extract from the 1944/45 Annual Report helps to set the scene for us. "In November last, at the invitation of the Education Committee and the Free Kindergarten Union, the Association of Creches joined with them in Education Week. Messrs Ball and Welch kindly lent a display window, where a very attractive exhibit was arranged by Mrs Bond and Mrs Dwyer. This drew a great deal of notice and publicity. A leaflet describing the work of the Creches was prepared and attracted attention; several thousands of these were

distributed, and in answer to many requests, were sent to the country. In May the Apple and Pear Board organised a large exhibition of Children's Welfare activities in the Melbourne Town Hall. We were justifiably proud of our exhibit. Mrs Robertson and Miss Macdougall made all the arrangements, and on each day children from different Creches were brought in, and lived in a portion of the Town Hall arranged like a Creche under normal Creche routine. They ate, slept and behaved beautifully, not in the least distressed by the large and interested crowd all day. Questions were answered by those in charge, Creche literature was distributed, donations and promises of annual subscriptions were received, and a great deal of valuable publicity was received."

And they were always lobbying! No opportunity was missed. Furthermore many of the Creche committee women had very good contacts in all three levels of government . . . through their husbands . . . and they used them to very good effect! The State Budget of 1944 allocated 3000 pounds to be divided between the eleven Creches. This was the beginning of a new era in care and education and there soon followed streamlined and very efficient administrative systems. the VADN office was set up in 1948 with a Supervisor of Creches, an Organising Secretary and two Social Workers. They negotiated Workers Compensation insurance for all Nursery staff and Public Liability insurance for everyone involved, whether paid or voluntary. They organised lectures and courses for staff, scholarships for students, radio broadcasts, fund raising appeals and they gave advice to many organisations on how to establish a child care facility. In addition, all parent interviews, enrolments, fee assessments and counselling took place within the VADN office or in parent's homes. By the 1950's they bought a car for the Social Workers to use. . I found the receipt: Melford Motors, 1 Ford Perfect, less Sales Tax, 580 pounds.

By this time the Health Department of Victoria had set the Conditions of Subsidy and they remained in force right up until the Children's Services Centres Regulations were introduced a few years ago. The Day Nurseries were never under the previous Child Minding Regulations. Those regulations are worthy of a few words where history is being talked about. From at least 1957 the VADN and others were expressing grave concern at the proliferation of unregistered minding centres. Year after year the Annual Report of the VADN mentions efforts to get regulations for these centres. The FKA, AECA and National Council of Women joined the VADN and this combined pressure finally produced results. In March 1963 Miss Elizabeth Sharpe, VADN Social Worker, was invited to join a Special Committee to consider and prepare legislation. Progress was very slow. Then in January 1964, seven children were burned to death in a fire at a Templestowe minding centre. The legislation was introduced into the Victorian Parliament thirty nine days later! 2

After school care was established in January 1963. A pilot was set up for twelve months with a grant of one thousand pounds from the Myer Foundation. It was a joint project between the VADN and VCOS. A qualified Social Worker was employed on a part time basis and university students were "roped in" as assistants.

I will conclude with a tribute to the Directors of the Day Nurseries. Yours is a very difficult and often a very lonely job. I would not do it for double the money. It will surprise and appal you that the position of Director, more recently called Co-ordinator by some, is under threat in some quarters. The job seems to be undervalued by some people. I almost referred to it as the oldest profession but that may offend you, so I will say the care of children is the second oldest profession. I urge you to maintain the friendships and the networks built up over the years. You must stick together because, unfortunately, the struggle for quality service is not over. We have now to maintain the standard we have attained. In closing I salute the pioneers of the services for children and families.

## STATE DAY NURSERIES FINALE

Community Child Care, the Commonwealth Department of Health, Housing, Local Government and Community Services, and the Victorian Association of Day Nurseries recently hosted a luncheon to farewell the State Day Nurseries. (These Nurseries are now funded by the Commonwealth Government).

Representatives from the groups spoke about the changes brought about by the altered funding arrangements, and resource materials from a number of agencies were displayed.

Rosemary Waite, of the Association of Subsidised Child Care Centres, gave an historical overview of the Nurseries. She highlighted the achievements and struggles of the staff and committees from the difficult days of the late nineteenth century, through the period of two wars to the present. The following is an edited version of her address.

Spoken at Meeting 1993

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