



Louise Turnbull Senior Manager of Education Services

Continuing a career supporting children and young people

Louise Turnbull has spent her professional life contributing to better opportunities for children and young people, including those at risk or with disabilities. An advocate of our mission and values, we are fortunate that she has now chosen to continue that through OzChild.

Her wealth of experience includes working as a teacher and psychologist across the education sector for 23 years. Before joining us she was

Specialist support for our Defence Force families

Last year we were contacted by the Manager, Education Policy and Special Needs, Defence Community Organisation, who had been a member of the steering committee for a research project OzChild had conducted in 2004 on the impact of student mobility on educational outcomes. She sought our assistance **to provide training** for the 186 school support aides employed in schools around army bases **to support students of parents in the Australian Defence Force (ADF)**. With the increase in ADF members who were being posted to hostile and dangerous parts of the world, the manager was aware that there was a need to actively support students who were experiencing heightened levels of anxiety and grief, associated with their parent's absence.

Erica Thompson, our Research and Development Coordinator, **tailored a program** to build the ADF School Support staff's **understanding of the impact of trauma, crisis and grief on children's behaviour** and to provide them with **training in a number of programs to enhance students' resilience and ability to cope**. The logistics of coordinating the program in locations as far apart as Darwin, Adelaide and Townsville was not without its challenges, but the positive feedback from participants, especially in relation to their increased confidence to support their students through difficult times, more than compensated for any difficulties.



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KIDS WORKS

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Manager of the Student Services Counselling and Support Unit of Chisholm Institute of TAFE.

As Senior Manager of Education Services **she will lead our services** to provide assistance to schools and their communities, support our Community Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning and our vocational training services, **all of which support students and young people to reach their full potential**. She will also lead the further development of Shine Assist. This program enables families and schools to work together in partnership with medical professionals and psychologists to address the psychological and emotional wellbeing of children and young adults. ■



A new approach to Kinship Care

For the last eleven years OzChild has run the only separate statutory Kinship Care program in Victoria. However, the predicted growth in the need for kinship placements has led the Department of Human Services to develop a new Kinship Care program to be rolled out across the state. **This new specialist Kinship Care model has been developed:**

- in response to a recognition of the increasing number of children being placed in statutory care over the past 10 years;
- because of changes in legislation which now require that Kinship Care is the first placement option to be considered by Child Protection for a child who needs to live away from their parents;
- in recognition that children in statutory Kinship Care have similar needs to those placed in foster care;
- and that private kinship arrangements also require support.

Our program has been widely recognised for its best practice and we were able to make a significant contribution to the development of the new program model on the basis of our unique experience. We successfully tendered for the Kinship Care programs in the Frankston/Mornington and Inner South sub-regions in the Southern Metropolitan Region and the new service commenced in January this year.

The new Kinship Care service goes beyond its principal function of providing placement support for children removed from parental care by Child Protection. It also provides an **Information and Advice Service** for anyone in the catchment areas who is involved in informal kinship care. A key component of this aspect is our **dedicated Kinship Care webpage** on the OzChild website. The third element is a limited **support service for kinship families** caring for a child or young person in either a private arrangement; a permanent care arrangement; or an ongoing statutory arrangement that is not currently receiving service from the kinship placement support service.

January and February were very busy months as we continued to manage existing clients who would remain with the new service, transition out those who were to come under the other Southern Region services provider, and **recruit new staff needed to enable us to meet our increased targets of 138 children placed at any one time**, plus the provision



Our Kinship Care team

of family support. We have been fortunate in being able to retain a core group of experienced staff through the uncertainties which accompanied the development of the new model in the previous year. We are also pleased to have a number of staff in other programs, transfer across to the Kinship Care program, in line with our organisational policy of encouraging internal staff movement to build practice wisdom and professional development.

The service is now almost at its full quota of staff and under the able leadership of Lynne McCrae, Manager, Child and Family Services and Senior Team Leader Bronwyn Harrison, it is off to a flying start. **Our depth of experience has been recognised** in the number of approaches for information and advice we have had from Kinship Care services in other regions who are setting up their programs for the first time. Beyond Victoria, our expertise is being sought by two major providers of Kinship Care in NSW who are also in the process of setting up new Kinship Care services and need training for their staff. ■

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The changing demands of childhood

OzChild has worked tirelessly since 1851 to improve the lives of children in Australia. Yes, that's 159 years of exploring what children need to protect them and to provide better life opportunities. But how times have changed.



Melbourne Orphan Asylum (South Melbourne 1850s)

1851 was the age of the tall ships, the gold rush and a lifestyle where cause and effect were much clearer than they are today. Personal needs were firstly of survival – food, water, shelter. Most employment options required little education and more often, only manual skills. A life journey was often driven far more by luck, or opportunity, than by preparation and long term expectations. Decisions of the moment were usually about immediate consequences rather than long term or delayed benefits.

It is little wonder then in such a basic lifestyle that our first services for children were simply shelter and food. 159 years later childhood is a very different experience. Changing life demands and opportunities mean that children now remain at home for much longer. Dependency on family lasts longer. Different experiences and influences of family life, be they good or bad, are far deeper reaching than they were in the 1850s. Domestic violence, broken and blended families, mental illness and drugs or alcohol are impacting on more children's and young peoples' lives, with less chance of early escape to other influences.

Education, which measures self esteem through success and failure against peers, now extends longer. Once, to age 14 was considered a sound education. Now, for most, post secondary level is the norm. For those who succeed in education it's wonderful. For others it is a long term reinforcement of failure – "I can't do what every one else my age can do".

Education is crucial for acquiring a position in most of today's employment market. Employment in turn progressively has become one definition of who we are - our identity, status and sense of worth.

The standards once set by the various denominations of religion, are increasingly questioned or refuted, but with no alternative values to guide aspirations or goals, so leaving the door open to define our identity a second way - success and worth measured through the never ending pursuit of material acquisition and immediacy.

The simple life is gone. Children today may not have the clearly defined risks of earlier generations but do have subtle veiled forces that set the trajectories for a lifetime. This extended dependency of modern childhood may

read as a pessimistic view but most children do have preparation for reasonable lives. The message here is that for those who have long and difficult childhoods the consequences are pronounced.

Our juvenile justice system becomes a solution for many a failed education. Depression will affect one in five in a lifetime. Poor emotional bonding will create social, emotional and educational failure and is shaped in infancy. So whilst the complex modern world works for most, those who suffer, suffer badly, yet with the right supports the damage can be minimised.



OzChild protects and builds futures

Given these contemporary issues OzChild has widened its support beyond providing only food and shelter as it did in the 1850s. Whilst it still **provides homes** for those who cannot safely live at home, it also

- prevents children from failing early in their school life;
- provides counselling for young people in schools;
- creates alternative education and occupation pathways for young people who struggle at school;
- provides mental health plans for young people and parents at risk of not coping;
- supports large numbers of families to help them through crises and misfortune, so the family remains intact for their children;
- provides respite for families supporting the demands of a disabled child, and
- provides specialised support for families of different cultures.

This is why, when people ask me what OzChild does, I find myself giving a really long answer. The short answer is that we try to do, for as many children as possible, what any really caring parent would want us to do to help that child have a brighter, safer and more successful future. ■

Tony Pitman
Chief Executive Officer

Care and support for children who can't live at home

Foster care has always been one of OzChild's flagship programs. As the largest single provider of foster care in Victoria **we place around 160 children each night with carers.** Last year 225 new children were placed in our program with a number having more than one episode of care. In other words, they came into care and then went home again, only to return at a later date when the family situation deteriorated once again.

Today, children who do come into care are more likely to be experiencing social, emotional and

behaviour problems, as a consequence of the trauma and abuse they have experienced in the family environment. Our **Therapeutic Foster Care program**, which we run in partnership with the Australian Childhood Foundation, is able to **provide specialist support** to some of these children but the **numbers are small due to funding constraints.** Carers in this program undertake specialist training to enable them to work more effectively with, and support, children who are victims of childhood trauma. ■

Therapeutic Foster Care turns Jake's life around

Jake is 10 years old and has been with his current carers since the age of 6. He had experienced profound abuse and neglect in the care of his mother who suffered from significant mental health issues and misused illicit substances. She died tragically 18 months into Jake's current placement.

Initially, Jake experienced severe sleep disturbances and night terrors. At school he was tired and unable to concentrate, although academically bright. He was aggressive with classmates and required school staff to be with him during play times. His behaviour towards other children also prevented him from going to after school care. At home Jake struggled to relate to his foster carers, particularly his foster mother.

With the support of the Therapeutic Foster Care Program, Jake's carers were helped to understand Jake's feelings and behaviour in the context of his experiences of abuse and trauma.

Over time, a strong relationship has developed between Jake and his foster mother.

She has been able to help him make sense of his pain, grief and trauma. She has also kept him involved in activities he enjoyed and was good at. He started in Scouts a year ago, and his carer has also become involved, to support him.

Jake's behaviour at school has now settled and according to his classroom teacher, he has become one of her most advanced students. Jake now has many friends at school and is regularly being nominated for, and has won, achievement awards. His classmates and teachers voted him Class Captain this year and he now wants to be School Captain in Grade 6.

Over the past three years Jake's life has changed. His carers helped him to understand his past, to identify his skills and capacity, and direct him into activities he both enjoyed and in which he experienced success. His carers took pride in his endeavours. They taught him to have fun, and in turn, this reduced his shame and sense of worthlessness. **Jake now has a positive vision for his future.** ■



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