

*This Annual Meeting on 30th September 1985, is the date the CPS decided would be the date that it finally phased out of its enforcement role. It is, therefore a time of some sadness, a time for looking back and evaluating the vital pioneering role the Society has developed from small beginnings in 1896.*

Diane Alley, CPS President 1985<sup>1</sup>



## *Challenges Ahead: 1974–1984*

By the 1970s, the Children's Protection Society, like most of the country, had experienced rapid and dramatic change. The Whitlam Government introduced radical changes to Australia's economic, legal and cultural landscape, including universal health care, the abolition of university fees, the end of Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War and the abolition of the death penalty. Australian society was changing and with it ideas around family, children and the role of women. In 1973, the Whitlam Government also introduced a Commonwealth Commission of Inquiry into Poverty, which established a national poverty line – known as the Henderson Poverty Line.<sup>2</sup>

But 1970s Australia was also on the brink of an economic recession. In 1974 the recession hit hard. The Children's Protection Society found itself in particular trouble, already struggling with staff and resources stretched beyond capacity and without any sign of recurring government funding. Left with little choice, in August 1973 the Society organised a seminar for staff and volunteers, as well as other groups working within the child welfare field, to ask three questions:

1. Should the Children's Protection Society continue *at all*?
2. Should the Children's Protection Society continue in its present form?
3. Should the Children's Protection Society do something else?

The overwhelming response from participants was that, not only should the Society keep going, but it should enlarge its activities.<sup>3</sup> This response was both encouraging and depressing, as it demonstrated just how important the work of the Society was, but also how many children and families would be abandoned if the Society ceased its operations. The annual report for 1974 concluded anxiously with the following comment on the future of the Society:

With the precarious financial position of CPS this work is in jeopardy and it would be disastrous to these families and to society in general if this work were to be abandoned and no other institution or department to step in.<sup>4</sup>



*CPS secretary Margaret Williams and president Shirley Campbell in the early 1980s.*

Financial pressure forced the Society to reduce its professional staff to one full-time and one part-time social worker, and to consequently reduce much of the work it was doing.<sup>5</sup> In Gippsland, the vast difference between payments for wards of the state compared with non-wards of the state in care, was two and a half times that in 1971. Geoffrey Gooding, president of the Gippsland Regional Committee, wrote in his 1974 report that ‘these uneven payments cannot be justified, especially when voluntary agencies such as Swan House are preventing greater calls on Government funds’.<sup>6</sup>

By 1974 the Children’s Protection Society had extended its reach to include Fitzroy, Heidelberg, Gippsland, Ballarat and Geelong. In April 1974, a public meeting with over 90 attendees voted for the extension of the Society’s services to Hamilton. A committee of 40 was formed and plans were set in motion to raise the necessary funds to establish a Residential Child Care Centre.<sup>7</sup>

Just three years after it was established, the Geelong branch of the Society was taking rapid strides. In 1974, under the leadership of the dynamic Betty Graham-Higgs, the Geelong branch established one of Australia’s first Parent Aides or family support programs. The Parent Aides were volunteer local women who were experienced parents, but not professional social workers. They would visit families in need in the Geelong area to help out with anything from ‘changing nappies’ or ‘demonstrating darning’, to ‘taking a mother to see the Head Teacher’.<sup>8</sup>

The Parent Aides were a great success and were enthusiastically accepted by the clients of the Society. It was so successful that in 1976 Graham-Higgs approached the regional Social Welfare Department director for funding to expand the program. The department was keen to take on responsibility for the program, so from 1976 the Parent Aide program was expanded and auspiced to the Social Welfare Department in Geelong. Though it grew beyond the CPS local team, the philosophy and practice established by Betty and her volunteers remained, and the Parent Aide Scheme operated for the next ten years.<sup>9</sup>

After being confronted by a particularly distressing case of child maltreatment, the Society’s Geelong social worker applied for the authority to remove children into state care – the first social worker outside of Melbourne to be granted such authority.<sup>10</sup> In 1975, the Geelong branch calculated that it had worked with 120 families, which included 284 children. The cost of a Parent Aide was calculated at \$30 per week and could assist two families and potentially stop children from becoming state wards. The cost of a single child in state care was estimated at \$60 per week or \$3,000 per year. ‘The work of CPS’, concluded the report, ‘needs little justification’.<sup>11</sup>

It was clear that the work being undertaken by the Society was not only essential, but it was the only organisation in Victoria doing this kind of investigatory work. However, by 1974 it was still largely a charity-based organisation, reliant on donations and grants to survive. President Anne Clemens, desperate to resolve an increasingly dire financial situation, approached the Victorian Government and asked if it would not be ‘more economic for the government to buy this service from the Children’s Protection Society’.<sup>12</sup> Especially since the Social Welfare Department was of the view that the organisation that cares for the child, *should not* be the one to apprehend them.

Unsuccessful in its appeal to the government, the Society sought help elsewhere, publicising its plight in the media. Wilma Paine heard this cry for help and offered her assistance. She joined the Society initially as a volunteer foster parent, providing short-term emergency care for children in need. After a short-lived foster parent trial in 1956, the Society tried again in 1973, keen to try to limit the number of children entering state care. Wilma Paine recalls:

At that time they were taking children from homes and they were going to institutions like Allambie, and when they went into those, if it was a family with siblings, when they arrived there they would be separated in age and go into all different areas, whether it was a brother and sister or what. So they were trying to establish some type of foster care where those children could go into a private home and not have to go to a government institution. That was what it was all about.<sup>13</sup>

As well as inspiring volunteers to help the Society, a number of auxiliaries also formed in order to actively support the Society. The Bacchus Marsh Auxiliary was established in 1972, followed by auxiliary groups in Doncaster/Templestowe and Toorak.<sup>14</sup> The work of these auxiliary groups went right to the heart of the philanthropic generosity that drove the establishment of the Society in 1896. These auxiliaries supplied financial assistance and material goods. Janice Farmelo was one of the founding members of the Bacchus Marsh Auxiliary, which initially focused its attention on Robin House. She recalls:

Each month we would take down plenty of beautiful fresh Bacchus Marsh fruit, vegetables and eggs. Of course no trip was ever complete without special treats for the children. On our first of many visits to 'Robin House', we were dreadfully dismayed (coming from the country and used to plenty of space) to see up to twelve youngsters playing in a wire mesh enclosed concrete yard no bigger than a single carport. Not a tree or blade of grass in sight. We were filled with admiration for the staff who provided cheerful and loving care for the children despite the cramped conditions.<sup>15</sup>

### ***Bacchus Marsh Auxiliary***

The Children's Protection Society (CPS) would not be where it is today without the hard work and commitment of the community of volunteers who have dedicated thousands of hours to the Society over its 120 year history.

The Bacchus Marsh Auxiliary was one such devoted group of volunteers. In 1972 CPS welfare officer Peg Sitlington spoke to the Anglican Mothers Union in Bacchus Marsh about the work she did assisting children and families. After hearing about this life-changing work, these women were inspired to get involved. Word spread and soon around 30 women had expressed a desire to help out. On 22 November 1972 the Bacchus Marsh Auxiliary was born.

For the next 41 years, the Bacchus Marsh Auxiliary supported the Children's Protection Society, supplying money raised through events and activities, as well as food, presents and other material necessities required by the Society and the children in its care.<sup>16</sup>

The auxiliary first turned its attention to Robin House, the emergency accommodation home attached to the Society's Fitzroy office. These country women were dismayed to discover that the children had just a small concrete yard to play in, with no trees, grass or plants of any kind. Wanting to share some country comforts with them, the auxiliary made monthly deliveries of fresh fruit, vegetables and eggs for the occupants of Robin House. When the Society moved to Heidelberg and set up Alys Key House as its new temporary accommodation home, the auxiliary helped furnish the house, supplying new carpet, drapes, linen and bedspreads. On the Society's request, the women in the auxiliary also made school uniforms for the children staying there.

The annual Christmas party was a highlight each year for both the children and the Bacchus Marsh Auxiliary. Members of the auxiliary would buy presents for the children staying with the Society. One of the founding members of the auxiliary, Janice Farmelo, remembers this fondly:

We always took great care to ascertain exactly what each child had on their wish list, because often it was not possible for Mum or Dad to provide anything at all.<sup>17</sup>

The auxiliary raised funds through a variety of activities, including raffles, luncheons and street stalls, but where it really shone was in catering events. One major highlight was the annual Big Breakfast held on Melbourne Cup Day for over 800 people. 'Our professional approach to catering engagements has always been a great source of pride to us', says Janice Farmelo.<sup>18</sup> The auxiliary even catered the CPS's Annual Women's Charity Tennis Days. In the 1990s the auxiliary introduced fundraising events known as 'Challenge Weekends', which included activities such as abseiling in Werribee Gorge and travelling in a gypsy caravan. Thanks to the fundraising efforts of the auxiliary, CPS was able to expand its protective services teams to include the western suburbs in 1981. As the

Society's role changed and it no longer provided emergency accommodation, the auxiliary began funding research projects.

While it recognised that it was helping children and families in need through the work being done by the Society, the auxiliary was also keen to help its own community in Bacchus Marsh. The women organised to serve morning tea on immunisation days and operated the local hospital refreshments trolley before a permanent kiosk was established. They also ran a successful holiday film program for local school children, raising money for the district community centre.

On top of all this, the auxiliary felt it had a responsibility to also help raise awareness about child abuse and to advocate on behalf of children. In the late 1980s it organised two seminars on child abuse in conjunction with the local police, as well as a protective behaviours information night for parents and teachers. Guest speakers were also invited to the auxiliary's monthly meetings.

In 2013, after 41 years of fundraising and supporting the Children's Protection Society, the Bacchus Marsh Auxiliary made the decision to retire and cease operation. Attendees at the last meeting included two women who had been members from the very beginning. Janice Farmelo was one of those members. Looking back with pride she says:

Life hasn't been all hard work for us and it's fair to say we wouldn't continue if we didn't enjoy it. There's a great deal of satisfaction knowing that in some small way, we're reaching out and helping children in need enjoy a better life.<sup>19</sup>



*Dedicated volunteers of the Bacchus Marsh Auxiliary (from left): Carolyn Olthof, Janice Farmelo, Erica Churchill, Denise Werner, Jenny van der Poel, Rhonda Currington and Roberta Morton.*



*CPS staff at the retirement of welfare officer Peg Sitlington (front, centre) in November 1979.*

### *A system under investigation*

In December 1974, the Hamer Government initiated an Inquiry into Child Care Services in Victoria.<sup>20</sup> This was the start of what would become a decade of investigation into Victoria's child welfare system, driven largely by the question of who should be responsible. The Children's Protection Society spent much of the following year applying for funding, writing submissions and visiting government offices to appeal for support. Despite the establishment of two new auxiliaries, the Society recognised that it needed reliable recurrent funding to continue to deliver the types of services it was currently providing.<sup>21</sup> Encouraged, or at least optimistic about the government's initiative, Anne Clemens reported in 1975:

The welfare field is very confused at present but it cannot go on much longer in this chaotic state and the next year will be, I feel the time for a definite pattern to start emerging that will hopefully prove to be a satisfactory blueprint for the future of welfare.<sup>22</sup>

In 1976, Dr Henry Kempe, a child abuse reform campaigner from America, and one of the first in the medical profession to identify battered baby syndrome, visited Australia. Speaking at a conference in Perth, he urged Australia to enforce mandatory reporting for all suspected cases of child abuse and to adopt a multidisciplinary approach to treating and preventing child abuse.<sup>23</sup>

### *Let's talk about child abuse*

Just as the late 1960s and early 1970s saw a growing professionalisation of child protection, the next decade witnessed a greater public awareness of, and willingness to report, suspected child abuse. There was a dramatic increase in the number of referrals the Society received and an increase in the number of referrals for physical abuse. Commenting on this in the annual report for 1976, the president suggested:

Perhaps it is because we are more aware of the needs of disturbed and underprivileged children or perhaps it really is that the children we are seeing are more disturbed and in need of a large range of supportive services than ever before.<sup>24</sup>

In researching the history of child protection in Australia, Dorothy Scott and Shurlee Swain concluded that this increase was much more likely to be a result of the rise in public awareness of child abuse and willingness to report suspected cases, rather than an actual increase in the level of child abuse occurring.<sup>25</sup> This is supported by the changing source of referrals, with the majority of referrals (in 61 per cent of cases) coming from professionals, not from relatives and neighbours, as was previously the case.<sup>26</sup>

After struggling in the early 1960s to gain professional recognition from the medical community, by the 1970s, the Children's Protection Society was well recognised as being one of the expert organisations on child maltreatment in Victoria. Other organisations and groups focused on child and family welfare also began to appear during the 1970s as attitudes towards women and families changed. More women were entering the workforce and motherhood did not necessarily mean the end of a woman's career. In addition, unmarried or single mothers were finding a voice and standing up against decades of discrimination and social exclusion. Community child care groups began to form, as well as groups like Parents Anonymous and the Council for the Single Mother and her Child.

There was a much greater public awareness of child abuse and factors that might be considered child abuse by this time, helped by the Society's active engagement with mainstream media. After the television screening of the documentary 'Do I Have to Kill my Child?' in 1977, the Society received close to 400 phone calls within 48 hours, many of those from self-referring parents.<sup>27</sup> Welfare officer Peg Sitlington saw this as 'an important breakthrough' and hoped the community would 'continue to relate to child abuse in a positive way'.<sup>28</sup> President Anne Clemens was less optimistic, feeling concerned that 'some people still seem to be discovering the problem for the first time'.<sup>29</sup> She also felt that Victoria still lagged behind other states in terms of child protection legislation, New South Wales having set up a centralised child protection unit and introduced legislation for mandatory reporting for all suspected cases of child abuse from 30 July 1977.<sup>30</sup> 'It is incredibly hard', Clemens lamented, 'to get any government or bureaucratic recognition of social change'.<sup>31</sup>

But all was not lost. In 1975 the Society received its first grant of \$25,000 from the Victorian Government towards the maintenance of its residential hostels.<sup>32</sup> This one-off grant allowed the Society to complete renovations to the new Alys Key House in Heidelberg. Opening in December 1976, Alys Key House became the Society's newest temporary emergency care home and replaced its original hostel, Robin House, in Fitzroy.<sup>33</sup> The bright, open spaces in the new Alys Key House were a welcome change from the cramped conditions of Robin House. The grant also included funding to secure the purchase of Currawong House, for the purpose of providing temporary emergency accommodation in Hamilton.<sup>34</sup>

In 1977 the Department of Social Welfare contributed funding for two social worker salaries.<sup>35</sup> Referrals to the Society had increased by 30 per cent by the end of that year and the Society was being asked by other welfare organisations, which were reluctant to involve the police, to take cases to court. This was a role the Society was authorised to do, but something it had done very infrequently since the employment of the first welfare officer, Peg Sitlington, in 1965. While the Society was always focused on children first, it also tried as much as possible to keep families together or to reunite them. The recommendation to remove children from families was made only as a very last resort. This shift towards the Society being asked to intervene and take cases to court, a role it was frequently asked to do decades earlier, seems to reflect the increased recognition of the expertise of



**TOP**

*Alys Key House, the Society's temporary emergency care home in Heidelberg.*

**BOTTOM**

*Currawong House, the Society's temporary emergency care accommodation in Hamilton.*

the Society, as well as a reluctance to involve the local police force.<sup>36</sup> By 1979, the Society initiated proceedings at the Children's Court in just over 13 per cent of all cases.<sup>37</sup>

As well as finding itself more involved in court cases, the Society was also shifting towards a more multidisciplinary approach to child protection. The president reported in 1977:

There is no doubt that being an independent organisation, not bound to any one department, helps us very much in our work and gives us a flexibility most necessary in cases which may involve hospitals, Health Department, Welfare Department, Education Department, Police and local authority as well.<sup>38</sup>

Child Protection Teams made up of a social worker, a community nurse, a welfare officer or a family aide volunteer were introduced by the Society in 1977, embracing this new multidisciplinary approach. The Society, now widely recognised as one of the leading authorities on child maltreatment, was assisted in case assessment by paediatricians, psychologists, psychiatrists and other therapists.<sup>39</sup> The annual report for that year recorded the emergence of an alarming new threat to child welfare: parental misuse of drugs. 'As one problem is overcome, another appears to arise', wrote president Anne Clemens, 'but let us hope that the coming year will see fewer children needing us'.<sup>40</sup>

By 1978, the Society had services operating in eight regions: Western, North Western, Outer East, Westernport, Inner Urban, North Eastern, Inner Eastern and Southern. But this rapid expansion was financially unsustainable without proper government support, and just prior to the announcement of the 1978 state budget, the Society found itself unable to meet increasing demands for services. Reluctantly, it withdrew from four of the eight regions, focusing its efforts in the Inner Urban, North Eastern, Inner Eastern and Southern suburbs.<sup>41</sup>

On 5 November 1979, the Children's Protection Society was authorised by the Victorian Government as a child protection agency under the *Social Welfare Act 1970*.<sup>42</sup> While the Society had been operating in this capacity since its establishment in 1896, its authority had been derived from various different Acts of legislation. Throughout its history, the Society has worked closely with the only other authorised body to respond to allegations of child abuse and neglect, the Victorian police force. In 1979, authority as a child protection agency was granted to the Society for a period of twelve months only, with the agency responsible for reapplying each year. Under this new Act, the government was also obliged to fund the Society to undertake the work it was legislated to do, which included:

- (a) to advise a Court relating to provisions for the welfare of a child or young person who is being considered by a Court for admission to the care of the Department; and
- (b) to receive notifications relating to the circumstance of a child or young person considered to be in need of care...<sup>43</sup>

## *On the frontline*

The 1980s were a pivotal time in the Society's history. Child protection was changing and the Children's Protection Society needed to change with it. The Society was finally receiving both professional and financial recognition from the government. Anne Clemens had been president for 16 years and felt that now was the time to step down. 'Now there is a visible improvement in these fortunes', she wrote in her last annual report, 'I feel that it is high time for me to give up the chair'.<sup>44</sup> A note of farewell to the outgoing president commented:

As a result of her tenacity and conviction and with the support of a loyal committee, she has successfully led the Society to the point where its role has been clearly recognised by the Victorian Government and the Society itself is emerging as a growing community force.<sup>45</sup>

For most of her presidency, Clemens had played the part of president, executive director, chief fundraiser, public relations officer and any other role that needed filling. As the Society's reputation grew and it became more widely recognised as an expert in the child protection field, this style of management needed to change. Since its establishment in 1896, the Society had relied on the generosity and patronage of women like Anne Clemens, whose privileged upbringings engendered



### **TOP, LEFT TO RIGHT**

*Senior social worker Dorothy Ford and president of the Northern Region Committee Wilma Paine in 1982.*

*Penny Armytage, team leader of the Northern Suburbs Child Protection Unit.*

*CPS president Shirley Campbell with the Minister for Community Welfare Services Walter Jona at the opening of the Northern Suburbs Child Protection Unit, 1982.*

### **BOTTOM, LEFT TO RIGHT**

*Minister for Community Welfare Services Pauline Toner at the Society's western suburbs office. By 1980, the Society operated nine child protection units across Victoria.*

*CPS president Shirley Campbell at the opening of the Southern Suburbs Child Protection Unit, 37 Lees Street, McKinnon, in 1982 with the unit's chairman and local member for Higinbotham Robert Lawson (left) and the Moorabbin Rotary Club president (right).*

*Northern Team members Carol Reeves, Jill Nicholson, Anne Trueman, Lynne Jordan and Jane Tucker in 1982.*

in them not only an obligation to assist others, but the freedom to do so. While this particular style of management had seen the Society through the last 80 plus years, it was not going to survive the next.

As government funding increased, so did expectation. When the Children's Protection Society was designated the authorised child protection authority in Victoria, it was also given the ambitious goal of providing 11 protective services units across Victoria's 18 regions by 1981.<sup>46</sup> As well as this, the Department of Community Welfare Services required that the Society appoint an executive director to manage the increasingly large administrative requirements of the Society.<sup>47</sup> Reverend Geoffrey Woodfield was appointed in late 1979 and became the Society's first executive director.<sup>48</sup> By 1980, the Society had nine child protection units operating in the Eastern Suburbs, Inner Urban, Northern Suburbs, Western Suburbs, Southern Suburbs, Westernport, Ballarat, Geelong and Shepparton regions. This expansion was rapid but the new units were quickly at capacity and caseload limits were soon introduced.<sup>49</sup> In her annual report in 1981, senior social worker Dorothy Ford commented:

... an avalanche of referrals began to pour in, as reporting rates suddenly grew beyond the predicted demand, resulting very quickly in impossible workloads for the numbers of staff allocated to each unit.<sup>50</sup>

Wilma Paine had been a volunteer foster parent for the Society throughout the 1970s. By 1980 when her own children had grown, she was looking for a new challenge. The Society was keen for Paine to be more involved and asked if she would consider becoming president of the new Northern Region Committee. At the time, this region covered a huge area, the distance between Sunbury and Doncaster. Paine remembers feeling a little overwhelmed by the prospect. 'That was an enormous region,' she recalls, 'and we were going to have three social workers to cover that whole area, which you can imagine was pretty hopeless really'.<sup>51</sup> Nonetheless, she accepted.

Penny Armytage was in her early twenties when she joined the Society as a child protection worker in the late 1970s. By 1980 she was team leader of the Northern Suburbs Child Protection Unit, overseeing that small team of three social workers. Together with the assistance of Wilma Paine and the Northern Region Committee, Armytage and her team took on the huge task of providing child protection services for this vast area. She remembers:

... we were a very small service for a very large catchment area and really only tended to work with the most extreme of cases ... we were at the pretty hard end of child protection work.<sup>52</sup>

Not only were they at the 'hard end' of child protection, but initially these social workers did not even have a permanent home to work from, relying instead on temporary accommodation in

Bundoora. Paine knew her most important aim was to secure a permanent home for the Northern Suburbs Child Protection Unit. But with no budget, it was a matter of raising the funds themselves. Paine planned to approach the local Rotary clubs for financial support to purchase a property in Preston:

But before that I thought ... rather than get the presidents, I might get their wives ... and I'll have a meeting at my home with them ... I invited them all, two from every club. We had a lovely day at our home, and Peg [Sitlington] spoke, and of course she was the most beautiful speaker and really could get the message through so well. They were all absolutely onboard. 'Yes we've got to do something here.' The idea was to get them to go home and tell their husbands that I'd be contacting them and have them all at a meeting, and that's what we wanted.<sup>53</sup>

Paine and Sitlington were so inspiring that every Rotary club that was able to, contributed \$1,500, enabling the Northern Region Committee to purchase a house in Preston for Penny Armytage and her team. The wives of the Rotarians wanted to do more to help, so they formed the Northern Auxiliary to raise money for the Society. This went on to become the most successful fundraising auxiliary connected to the Society.<sup>54</sup>

The Northern Suburbs Child Protection Unit was one of nine child protection units operating in Victoria at this time. It was not the only unit that relied on the generosity of the local community. In 1982 the Northern Suburbs Child Protection Unit was one of five units to have acquired a premises through the generous donations of community groups. The newly established Inner Eastern Suburbs Child Protection Unit opened in September at 333 Waverley Road, Mount Waverley, in a building provided by the Rotary Club of Waverley. The Southern Suburbs Child Protection Unit operated from 37 Lees Street, McKinnon, in an office generously provided by the Rotary Club of Bentleigh, the Westernport Regional Child Protection Unit worked from 36 King Street, Dandenong, from a building donated by the Lions Club of Dandenong and the Geelong Child Protection Unit was operating out of Lindsay Field House on Aberdeen Street, named after the Lindsay Field Trust, which donated a substantial amount of the funding required to purchase the property.<sup>55</sup>

### *Demand outstrips supply*

By the end of 1981, the Society had received 1,296 requests for help, the majority suspected cases of physical abuse and neglect. Some of those cases had to wait more than 48 hours before staff could address them. That year, 510 children passed through the Society's three emergency temporary homes, most of them needing accommodation due to family illness or parent relief.<sup>56</sup> By 1983,



*The Geelong Child Protection Team: Chris Peterson, Sue Ritter, Zona Becker, Phillip Swain and Ruth Baird.*

requests for services had risen to 3,461. The Society was able to accept 1,253 requests but had to refer 273 requests to the police as it did not have the staff or resources to handle them.<sup>57</sup> Such was the demand for services that the Society could only provide the necessary frontline support and not the level of preventative care and education it wanted to. This frustration was articulated by new president Shirley Campbell in 1983:

It is a dilemma, when as a community we clearly recognise our overall responsibility for the protection of children exposed to the risks of physical, emotional and sexual abuse and neglect and yet, [we] are unable to provide broad enough protective and support services to assist families to resolve the stresses and tensions which precipitate such maltreatment of children [in the first place].<sup>58</sup>

Funding was again a pressing challenge. In February 1981 the Society launched its first state-wide funding appeal, Appeal 81. While it contributed positively to community awareness of the Society, it was not a financial success. By the end of the financial year, the Society had a deficit of \$29,327. Appeal 82 was launched in May 1982, but by the end of June, the Society faced an increased deficit of \$57,699.<sup>59</sup> When the Society was granted the authority, along with the police force, as Victoria's child protection agency under the *Social Welfare Act 1970*, this came with an understanding that the Victorian Government would fund the salary costs for the required child protection services, since this was now a statutory function delegated by the Victorian Government to the Children's Protection Society.<sup>60</sup> In reality, however, the Society needed to find 33 per cent of the necessary funding to run the protective services.<sup>61</sup> The situation was becoming increasingly unmanageable. The Society's executive director Geoffrey Woodfield cautioned, 'This is a serious situation in an organisation which has no reserve funds, and will become more serious each year if deficits are allowed to accumulate'.<sup>62</sup>

Despite these immense challenges, the Society kept operating and continued to expand. In 1981 it received a grant from the George Adams (Tattersalls) Trust of \$100,000 per year for a period of five years. This funding was used to launch the 'When Love is Not Enough' campaign, aimed at raising awareness of child and family problems that can lead to child maltreatment. This program included a suite of workshops, professional education programs, and a conference with the aim of educating both the general public and child protection professionals.<sup>63</sup> Public support for the Society and the work it was doing continued to increase. The Society's membership, made up of its financial supporters, rose from 750 in 1978 to 1,456 in 1982. But it was estimated that the Society needed 5,000 members each contributing \$20 a year in order to be fully funded.<sup>64</sup>

By November 1981, the Children's Protection Society finally reached the government's requirement of 11 child protection units, with services operating in the regions of Ballarat, Inner Eastern Suburbs, Geelong, Inner Urban, North Eastern Suburbs, North Western Suburbs, Outer

Easters Suburbs, Shepparton, Southern Suburbs, Western Suburbs and Westernport, as well as the three emergency care facilities in Heidelberg, Hamilton and Sale. Despite spanning 11 regions, the Society had just 40 professional staff in 1983.<sup>65</sup>

After a request for additional funding from the Society in 1982, the Department of Community Welfare Services initiated a review of some of the services. The review covered three regions and was undertaken jointly by the Minister of Community Welfare Services and the Society. Completed in 1983, it raised many questions and revealed a difference in philosophical and practical positions on child protection between the two groups. The review also included a number of recommendations, such as minimum staffing numbers, and made permanent the temporary measure of referring cases to the local police when caseload limits within the Society were reached.<sup>66</sup>

Morale was low and anxieties high amongst the staff at the Children's Protection Society. It was disheartening for many of the Society's social workers to have to turn away cases, and there were tensions within the police force, with some senior police officers believing that child protection investigation should only be a role for the police when it was a criminal matter.<sup>67</sup>

Additionally, there was growing criticism of the Society and the Royal Children's Hospital from some sectors within the community that felt these groups had punitive attitudes towards parents.<sup>68</sup> The Children's Protection Society was particularly targeted, as it was seen by some as a charity run by those of the upper and middle classes, imposing their values on working-class families.<sup>69</sup> 'Niggling Doubts over the Role of the Children's Protection Society' was just one headline from *The Age*, which published a number of articles and letters to the editor between 1981 and 1983 that were critical of the Society.<sup>70</sup> Responding to one such article, Phillip Swain, team leader of the CPS Geelong Child Protection Unit, sent a letter to the editor in defense of the Society and its social workers.<sup>71</sup> He wrote:

... it distresses me that often the greatest frustration is not the horror of what some families and parents inflict upon their children ... it is the persistent, insidious attempts to portray social workers in this field as callous and uncaring, as power hungry demagogues who seek every opportunity to disrupt family life, a portrayal which fits neither the philosophy nor practice of the vast majority of people in this field.<sup>72</sup>

In 1983 the Society lost seven social workers.<sup>73</sup> Penny Armytage was working as a social worker for the Society at this time and remembers the very challenging nature of the job:

I think that there were times when each of us thought, how many more children do I want to remove from their families ... because the actual point of making a decision [that] it wasn't safe to leave a child there and that you had to intervene, is always very harrowing and it's personally very taxing ...<sup>74</sup>



**TOP**

*CPS president Shirley Campbell and welfare officer Bev Borley at the Second Australian Child Abuse Conference in Brisbane, 1981.*

**BOTTOM**

*CPS staff members: Penny Armytage, Jenny Glare, Bev Borley and Fran Hurley.*



**TOP**

*Executive committee members Neil Westaway, Shirley Campbell, Phillip Zass, Diane Alley and Martin Fuggle in 1983.*

**BOTTOM**

*Minister for Community Services, Caroline Hogg (left) and Diane Alley, who took up the role of CPS president in 1985. The year was a turning point for the Society when it relinquished its role as Victoria's child protection authority.*

### *The beginning of the end?*

By 1983, it was clear that the Society could not continue the way it had been. As well as enduring unsustainable debt, the Society was aware that the Victorian Government had commissioned the Child Welfare Practice and Legislation Review, a recommendation of the Norgard Report, which was released in 1976 as a result of the Hamer Government's Inquiry into Child Care Services in Victoria.<sup>75</sup> A discussion paper by the review committee was released in September 1983. Included in the paper was the committee's proposal that:

... a single statutory body be responsible for child maltreatment and the co-ordination of activities of all other interested agencies ... the Committee does not regard either of the two existing principal agencies as being suitable to undertake these four responsibilities. The police do not have the training or specialization to provide leadership in child maltreatment. As a matter of principle, the Committee does not believe that a voluntary agency, such as the Children's Protection Society, should have powers which are properly the responsibility of the State.<sup>76</sup>

It was clear which way the wind was blowing. Both the government and a vocal and significant section of the wider community, it seemed, were keen for child protection to become the sole responsibility of the government.

In July 1983, the Society's financial situation was so dire that Treasurer Martin Fuggle insisted that if the Society was to survive, it needed to drastically reduce costs. Wilma Paine was president of the North West Region and a participant at the executive committee meetings at the time. She recalls:

I well remember a couple of very critical meetings at Gertrude Street ... I remember Martin Fuggle, who was the treasurer at the time, and he just wouldn't pass the budget – because it was going to be the end ... he just refused to pass the budget and there was a lot of turmoil in the whole organisation at that time.<sup>77</sup>

Finally, the very hard decision was made to reduce services and staff, and as a result the Society managed to avoid insolvency. But the cost was high. The president, executive director, deputy director and senior social worker all resigned within a year.<sup>78</sup> Stepping up as acting executive director, Penny Armytage wrote in 1984, 'This decision has caused considerable dismay to all involved and had serious effects on staff morale'.<sup>79</sup> She recognised that if it was to have any chance to survive into the future, the Society needed to reassess and rethink its approach. Under a much reduced leadership team of Diane Alley as acting president and Penny Armytage as acting executive director, the Society agreed to undertake an internal review. Diane Alley remarked:

... the Society was going through an extended period of crisis in 1983, and communication both internal and external was fragile, it was agreed that it was absolutely essential that CPS undertake management and program review without delay.<sup>80</sup>

An internal review conducted by Francis Donovan Consulting Services determined in June 1984 that the Society should ‘decide to cease to function as a specialist assessment and enforcement agency’ and ‘phase out its residential care program’.<sup>81</sup> In essence: give up its authority as a child protection agency. It was a bitter, but not unexpected recommendation.

The final report of the Child Welfare Practice and Legislation Review, which became known as the Carney Review after the chairman of the committee, Dr Terry Carney, was released that same year. One of hundreds of recommendations was:

That responsibility for intervention in cases of child maltreatment be an exclusive state responsibility. The Children’s Protection Society should cease to be authorised to undertake investigations of alleged instances of child maltreatment and neglect.<sup>82</sup>

Geelong team leader Phillip Swain remembers this time clearly:

Like many staff, I think, I had misgivings about the Carney Review – not the principles and what it was trying to achieve (a better child protection system and network of services, and better support for families) but I think some/many of the CPS staff felt that CPS was ‘in the spotlight’ and that the real sub-text of the Carney Review was to ‘get rid of us’.<sup>83</sup>

Penny Armytage became executive director in 1984. Reflecting on that time, she conceded:

I think it was very hard to give up work that the agency thought they had done very well. We were very proud of the quality of service that we provided with very, very limited resources so I think that was quite challenging.<sup>84</sup>

But the Society’s internal review noted the very specialised skills and expertise that the Society brought to the child welfare field. It did not advocate for the end of the Society altogether, but recommended a shift in focus: a pioneering role in advocacy, community education, research and specialised preventative work. New president Diane Alley saw a strong future for the Society:

Once again, it will be starting in a small pilot way, but still encompassing the main aims and objectives from which it first grew. Therefore, although today may, for the Society, be an ending, it is also a challenging beginning.<sup>85</sup>