

A Living Library Project

History of Children's Services in the Western Region

**Putting Magic in the Lives of Children
and Participation in the Lives of Their Parents:**

Project Report, 1992

Prepared by Christine Carolan and Sheila Byard
for the Crow Collection Association



"Putting Magic in the Lives of Children -
Participation in the Lives of Their Parents"

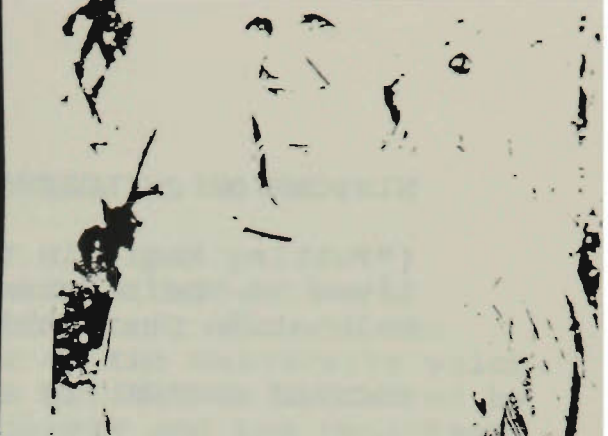
The Project Report
by Sheila Byard and Christine Carolan
1992

Published by the Crow Collection Association as part of the 1992
Living Library Project on the History of children's Services

Booklet Number 11.

Illustration by Simon Kneebone from "Do It Yourself Social
Research" by Yoland Wadsworth.





HISTORY OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES IN THE WESTERN REGION

("Putting Magic in the Lives of Children and Participation in the Lives of their Parents" - a project funded by the Lance Reichstein Charitable Foundation.)

PROJECT REPORT BY SHEILA BYARD AND CHRISTINE CAROLAN

This report describes the History of Western Region Children's Services project conducted by the Crow Collection Association in conjunction with the Victoria University of Technology.

Funding of \$10,000 from the Lance Reichstein Charitable Foundation was awarded in mid-1991 on the basis of an application which proposed an interactive, community based history project, designed to help residents in the West, especially young people, link present issues in children's services with source material from the Crow Collection, so as to assist in planning for the future.

The funding application used the title "Putting Magic in the Lives of Children and Participation in the Lives of their Parents" to place the project in its historic setting. "Putting Magic in the Lives of Children" was a slogan from the early 1940s used to popularise the need for preschool education. Thirty years later the community child care movement of the 1970s emphasised the need for parent involvement in the services provided for their children, via "Participation in the Lives of Parents". The project design aimed to reexamine these notions at a time when the demand for publically funded services outstrips the ability of government to provide.

This title has been retained in the name of this project report but for most people who came into contact with the project it was known as "the Reichstein project" or "the Western Region History of Children's Services project".

The Crow Collection Association has as a primary role the encouragement of teaching and research based on the materials in the Crow Collection in the University Library on the Footscray Campus. The Association came into existence because those who had worked with Ruth and the late Maurie Crow in various ways were concerned to see that the Crow archive should not become stale but rather be a stimulus for the type of research and activity with which the Crows had always been associated.

Through a system of project committees and project advice, members of the Association provide assistance to researchers of every level working within the collection. Members of the Association share an interest in building up the capacity of communities to find solutions to their own problems and in linking amateur and professional researchers; this interest led to the setting up of the Association after the Crow archive came to the University in 1990, and to the evolution of the Living Library concept.

For the three hundred subscribers to the Association's ECOSO Exchange Newsletter throughout Australia and overseas, this Reichstein project is merely the first in a series of Living

Library projects which will enable proper use to be made of the resources of the Crow Collection.

Whatever the desire of the members of the Crow Collection Association, such bridge-building could not occur without the willing and generous support of the parts of the University which provide the institutional setting for the activities sponsored by the Association, namely the University Library and the Department of Humanities and the Urban Studies Unit within the Faculty of Arts. Staff from within these sections, including Brian Hubber, Susan Jennison, Barbara Braun and Moira Simcock, have provided significant input to the Project, especially through the steering committee.

The success of the project has depended on the willingness of senior staff of the University - Ms Doreen Parker (University Librarian), Professor Rodger Eade (Head, Department of Humanities) and Mr Des Eccles (Head, Urban Studies Unit) - to be willing to offer hospitality to the Association, to accept the Reichstein funding and to locate the project officer, Christine Carolan, as a sessional member of staff within the Urban Studies Unit.

The University's predecessor institutes made community access to the libraries a mark of the way in which further education in Victoria's western metropolitan region would link itself to its regional community. The transition to university status came at a time when some further education libraries have felt the need to put up shutters against the increasing and unfunded demands upon their time and resources being made by school students.

One of the objectives of the Living Library approach has been to assist in finding ways of catering to the increasing demand for information and raw data for research from senior secondary - Victorian Certificate of Education - students without overtaxing the resources of the library. An important aspect of funded projects was seen to be the opportunity to generate both fresh material and reprints which would facilitate access to the Collection, and be of continuing use within the Region. The experience of the Library in relation to the Westdoc/ Access to the West/Windows on the West projects offered a significant guide and the steering committee was grateful both to Olwen Ford of the Living Museum of the West and to Morag Loh for advice in promoting accessibility.

Minutes of the steering committee and the regular Project Bulletins were circulated both to children's service officers in the municipalities of the region and to others in schools, universities and colleges, and the wider community who were judged to have an interest in the project and its outcomes.

Although early meetings of the steering committee identified the desirability of picking up the diverse childcare concerns of the Region, from old established services facing restructuring to the relatively serviceless areas at the urban fringe, it became apparent that it would be necessary to focus the project on schools and communities which were interested in the collaborative possibilities the Project offered them.

In this process of focussing it has been crucial for the success of the project to have had regular contributions from Western

Region workers including Sue Parsons (City of Sunshine), Susan Thompson (City of Footscray), Lyn Henderson (City of Werribee), Louise Glanville (formerly Social Planner, Western Region Commission, now Department of Social Work, Victoria University of Technology) and Janet Alewood (Shire of Bacchus Marsh).

A consideration in the appointment of project officer had been to find a worker capable of working with selected school community groups in the Region, to link some current issue(s) in children's services with what was available through the Crow Collection. By late October 1991 it became apparent that the Two Tiered Childcare Funding issue would offer an opportunity for the project to provide immediately useful material for trialling in schools.

This stage of the project involved collation of material from four main sources. As the federal government, through the Department of Health, Housing and Community Services, moved to introduce a two tiered fee relief scheme, documents were selected from the Collection to provide historical background to the issue. Community newspapers in the region were culled for current commentary. Community Child Care, representing community run childcare organizations, provided some materials. Two interviews were conducted with women who had responded to a request from the Project for information on the likely impact of the cuts. (These interviews were used by several groups in making submission to Federal Minister Staples during the campaign.)

Documents located within the Collection were reprinted as a resource together with the final year B.A. project of Kathleen Codognotto on the history of Footscray's Tweddle Baby Hospital, for which some research had been done in the Collection. The University's Publication Department were of great assistance in this exercise.

Trialling of some of the issue based material with students from Williamstown High School, both at school and at the Footscray campus, led to the generation of the the project publication which has had widest circulation: "The Issue - Federal Budget Cuts to Childcare". This material was presented as an example for VCE unit 3 students to see how they could tackle the Presentation of an Issue Common Assessment Task (CAT). Copies of this material went to every VCE provider in the region.

At this stage the project steering committee saw the importance of the provision of some simple material to explain the nature of the Collection and type of research which might be based on it. Accordingly the decision was taken to have the Project Worker prepare a video about the Crow Collection, called "Scattering Seeds for Change". This twenty-seven minute video tape shows Marnie Statkus, a local secondary student coming to the University Library at Footscray Campus, interviewing Ruth Crow about the way the Collection was created and how it might be useful to her in her studies. Ruth is shown talking about the way in which local government became involved in children's services, and the changes which have taken place over the last fifty years. The work of the University's Educational Development Department was crucial in this exercise; the Project Steering Committee is very grateful to Roger Funk for high level

technical assistance in this matter, especially within the very tight time constraints of the middle period of the project.

The video has been shown to a wide variety of audiences inside universities and TAFE programmes, to community groups and to school groups, as well as being used by individual researchers.

An in-service was held for workers from the City of Sunshine Children's Services section to help them see the impact on contemporary conditions of the historic development of programs for children in the municipality. The Meredith Sussex paper reprinted in the Project series was used in this activity. Noting that it had been possible for the project to publish such material, these workers felt that there were many women in the Sunshine area who had done things for local children; they thought they would like to see the contribution chronicled and began a list of the women they would like to see interviewed. This provided the impetus for the direction of the final stage of the project.

Contact had been made with teachers and pupils of the Sunshine Secondary College Senior Campus when there was an invitation for Christine Carolan to work with an English as a Second Language class. These students had chosen cuts to childcare as the issue they wished to investigate for their CAT. They undertook the exercise of writing letters expressing their opinions on this issue.

It became apparent that there could be a fruitful conjunction between the interests of the photography students of Warwick Page and Roger Funk(Victoria University of Technology) and those of VCE Australian Studies students at Sunshine Secondary College who undertook to interview these women nominated by the City of Sunshine staff, and to write up pen portraits. They could then use the material as the basis of their Australian Studies major project; some decided to write up an interview as a biography while others decided to focus on an issue, such as voluntary work, that arose from the interview material. This work became known as "The Women of the West" sub-project.

From the outset the steering committee had the view that there should be a seminar or celebration at the end of project which would enable a display of the outcomes of the Project, and to provide participants of whatever age and stage with an opportunity to meet each other. The development of the display for the May "Scattering Seeds for Change Celebration " under the auspices of the Project, turned out to be a particularly valuable experience for a number of reasons.

The students, both secondary and tertiary, were able to show the fruits of their research: how, in various periods in the past, women had worked hard on many different childrens' service projects, usually in a voluntary capacity. The women have succeeded in running such things as a holiday program and an art show, a kindergarten and an emergency food relief scheme because they believed what they were doing was important and because they were able to link up with like-minded women.

Thanks to the work of the students, the contribution of these women will be available for public acknowledgement. The

display of photographs and pen portraits has been booked to be shown at six more venues in the West, the print publications of the Project and video tape are available to inform future enquirers.

Staff of the University were given a chance to come closer to contemporary practice in the schools of the region and to test further ways of making the University's research and in particular the collections of the University's libraries appropriately accessible to the community. (Although it might not be wise to repeat the episode which brought all the Year 11 Australian Studies students from a particular school, to visit the Crow Collection in a given week - there turned out to be three hundred of them!)

A feature of the project from the University's viewpoint has been the opportunity for staff to work closely with voluntary collaborators; the appointment of Ruth Crow as an Honorary Fellow of the Humanities Department in 1990 has meant a significant opportunity for members of the University to draw upon her substantial experience in applied social research.

For participating workers in the childrens' services in the municipalities, at a time of considerable pressure, the project is seen as having provided an opportunity to reflect on the principles underlying their work, in a neutral setting.

We thank Louise Glanville for being willing to round off the project with her paper linking the past, the present and the future in this significant area of children's services.

The steering committee is confident that the Reichstein Project has demonstrated the viability of the Living Library concept and made a useful contribution to the History of Children's Services in the Western Region, much to the gratification of those whose contributions have made the success of the Project possible.

As individuals and organizations become involved in finding answers to the future planning and administration of services for children, the project materials - the twelve booklets, the video and the travelling photo display - will provide information, encouragement and example. They are available at cost from the Crow Collection Association/ Urban Studies Unit, Victoria University of Technology (Footscray Campus).

Crow Collection Association
Victoria University of Technology

Living Library Project on History of Children's Services
Funded by the Lance Reichstein Charitable Foundation
Sept. 1991 to May 1992
Booklets Published as Background Material.

1. The History of the Carlton Refuge from 1850s to 1920
First published 1920
2. Two Articles about Health of Women and Children :-
"The Neglected Children's Aid Society"
First published 1911
and
"The After Care Home and the District Nurses".
First published 1925
3. Two Documents about Attitudes to Slums
"Slum Babies and Slum Mothers"
First published about 1914
and
"You can't lift every baby out of the slums
The Slum Abolition Movement in the 1930s
4. History of Children's Services in Melbourne Municipality
1910 to 1980
5. "Bread and Treacle Diet"
Extracts from documents of the 1930s.
6. "Mothers must Work To Win"
Photos and leaflets from the Brunswick Children's
Centre, 1943.
7. "The Deprived West/ The Determined West" an extract from a
report by Ruth and Maurie Crow, first published 1972.
8. Creating Community in the Neighbourhood - Neighbourhood
Houses in the Western Region", transcript of a tape by
Meredith Sussex, 1978.
9. History of the Tweddle Baby Hospital. by Kathleen
Codogonotto
First published 1992
10. The past, present and future - Children's Services in the
Western Region, a report by Louise Gianville, 1992
11. "Magic in the Lives of Children, Participation in the
Lives of their Parents" report prepared by Christine
Carolan and Sheila Byard. 1992.
12. Kit on Federal Funding of Children's Services.

About the Project

The Lance Reichstein Charitable Foundation funded the Crow Collection for a Living Library Project on children's services in the Western Region.

A Project Steering Committee has assisted the project worker (Christine Carolan) who has worked with providers of children's services teachers and students in the Region.

The project resulted in the production of a video which includes information on the history of child care, a kit about the way children's services are funded, a series of booklets describing community movements which resulted in initiating some of the present children's services and a display of photos of some of the people who have helped to establish these services in Melbourne's Western Region

A seminar on May 22nd 1992 marked the end of this project but the video and publications can be used well into the future.

About the Collection

Ruth Crow and her late husband, Maurie were involved in movements on urban issues from the mid 1930s. Over the years they built up an extensive collection of documents :- books, pamphlets, posters, photos and working papers.

In 1990 the Victoria University of Technology (Footscray Campus) invited Ruth to donate the collection to the VUT Library.

The Crow Collection includes documents written and/or used by groups and individuals committed to social change. This store of information from the past is being used to generate ideas about the future.

A Crow Collection Association has been formed and incorporated. One of its aims is to enhance the comprehensiveness and accessibility of the Collection through Living Library Projects.



The Crow Collection

For more information, contact

Crow Collection Association
Urban Studies Unit
Victoria University of Technology (Footscray)
PO Box 14428 MMC,
Melbourne 3000
Phone: (03) 688 4754, Fax: (03) 688 4805

**VICTORIA
UNIVERSITY**



OF
TECHNOLOGY

This kit has been funded by the Lance Reichstein Charitable Foundation