



**VICTORIA UNIVERSITY**  
MELBOURNE AUSTRALIA

*Ecoso exchange newsletter 2/28; Oct. 1993*

This is the Published version of the following publication

UNSPECIFIED (1993) Ecoso exchange newsletter 2/28; Oct. 1993. Ecoso exchange newsletter, 2 (28). pp. 1-14.

The publisher's official version can be found at

Note that access to this version may require subscription.

Downloaded from VU Research Repository <https://vuir.vu.edu.au/16308/>

# Ecoso Exchange Newsletter

No 2/28, October 1993

ISSN 1033 9205

About this Issue of Ecoso. During the last few months Sheila Byard (Hon.Sec. Crow Collection) and Ruth Crow (Co-ordinator of the Collection) have been involved with preparing material on planning for the changing needs of elderly people.

Sheila is still working on material she prepared for an international conference on housing and elderly people which was held in Japan early in August. Ruth prepared some material for the Housing for Aged Action Group submission to the Industry Inquiry on Public Housing which held hearings in Melbourne in early September. She is now preparing material for a community seminar which will be held in the Latrobe Valley in mid October.

For these reasons this Ecoso's main contents are :-  
page.

1. An Invitation to Discuss Planning for Elderly People
2. Reports from International Conference held in Kobe - "Housing for the Aged, Cross National Perspective".
5. Old Age - Nothing so Unforeseen (Rick Mohr)
7. Community Housing ? Public Housing ? What's in a Name ? (Submission to Industry Commission Inquiry)
11. Bits and Pieces - Mary Gilmore and Cosme, Aboriginal Children's Art.
12. The Birth of Shop Committee (Tony Restarick)
13. Is Wealth a Well Spent Age ? (Ann Woodruff)

.....

Keep in touch with the Crow Collection by subscribing to Ecoso Exchange Newsletter. See subscription form page 6.

.....

## **Crow Collection Association**

### **Planning for Elderly People**

Discussion Groups and Viewing Collection  
at

Victoria University of Technology (Footscray Campus)  
from 4 p.m to 7 p.m.on Friday, October 29th  
Program

4 p.m Viewing Crow Collection (Room P 409)

5 p.m. Refreshments and Discussion (Room E 409)

*Participants are invited to suggest topics  
for student projects on planning for elderly people.  
If possible please bring a written proposal.*

## Provision of Housing for the Aged Cross National Perspectives

An international conference on *Housing the Elderly in Cross National Perspective* was held in Kobe (Japan) the first week in August, this year. Sheila Byard (Hon. Sec. of the Crow Collection Association) attended the conference.

In this Ecoso we publish extracts from three reports... three perspectives from three different countries :-

1. From Australia, Sheila Byard, Department of Urban and Social Policy, Victoria University of Technology.
2. From the United Kingdom, Christopher Watson, Centre for Urban and Regional Studies, University of Birmingham.
3. From New Zealand, David Thorn, Department of Sociology, University of Canterbury.

### 1. An Australian Perspective.

Here is a summary from Sheila Byard's paper which was entitled "Legal Constraints on the Private Provision of Housing for the Aged" :-

*Australia's preference for owner occupancy appears to have had a decisive influence on the type of age-specific housing which has emerged in the last decade. This paper analyses recent reviews of administrative decisions by municipalities in Australia relating to the development of private housing for older persons in retirement villages. It is part of a larger study being undertaken to look at cross-national perspectives on the role of local government in housing policies and programs for elderly people. Constraints on this type of development include the legal structure affecting retirement villages in the various states and the impact of determinations made under planning legislation in the states as a result of contestation of decisions made by municipal authorities under planning schemes. (Ecoso emphasis.)*

Using transparencies Sheila posed and answered the following questions :-

*What are Retirement Villages ?*

*To what extent does Australian housing policy debate take account of the Australian retirement village phenomena ?*

*What do we find out about retirement villages from the work of the Australian Housing Strategy ?*

*What is the role of the municipalities as the responsible authorities ?*

*Does the administrative review create policy ?*

She concluded :-

*While the familiar built forms of Australia's preference for owner-occupation appear to have had the decisive influence on the type of age specific housing which has emerged in the last decade, there is evidence that housing policy in Australia has hitherto ignored the socio-legal constraints on the retirement village phenomenon. Future research will need to re-assess the role of local government in judgements about this form of private age specific housing and the social and economic costs of retirement villages.*

### A United Kingdom Perspective

Christopher Watson called his paper **Housing and the Elderly in Britain - Aspirations, Problems and Prospects**. Here is some information from his paper :-

The Conservative government elected in Britain in 1979 had three main housing objectives :-

- A. encouragement of home ownership;
- B. the revival of the private rental sector;
- C. the limitation of public spending on housing to "what the country can afford".

Objectives which have emerged subsequently include :-

- a. the encouragement to local authorities to see themselves as "enablers", rather than providers,
- b. the support given to housing associations developing their role as builders and managers of social housing.

Here is a direct quote about the results of these policies:-

*Reviewing the consequences of these policies the recent **Inquiry into British Housing chaired by HRH the Duke of Edinburgh**, concluded that the government's emphasis on owner occupation (achieved largely through the sale of council houses) and its reduction of financial support to the local authority housing sector (resulting in very low levels of house building) have contributed to a growing shortage of housing in Britain; an inability to respond adequately to the needs of the homeless; a continuing problem of housing that is unfit or in serious disrepair; a growing problem of public sector housing that is difficult to manage and maintain; and an increasingly polarised housing system, reflecting tensions and divisions within society. (My emphasis, Ecoso editor.)*

### 3. A New Zealand Perspective.

David Thorn called his paper **A Level Playing Field ? Changes to Government Housing Policy for the Elderly in New Zealand**. He gave some very valuable facts and figures on the changes which took place in housing policies as the elderly population became more affluent in the 1970s and 1980s.

Here are his conclusions :-

Those affected by the depression and war during the 1930s and 1940s were late starters in both the job and housing markets and thus had less opportunity to accumulate. The survivors of this group form the "old" of the elderly population. The next cohort were much more fortunate as they benefited from the post war expansion which created a growing job market. In addition, national housing policies at this time provided subsidised loan finance so allowing home ownership to expand, housing was thus affordable.

The result has been that most of this cohort have accumulated assets benefiting them from the 1970s housing booms which markedly increased their capital values. As they enter retirement the majority of this group can consider equity release to supplement their income or can gift monies to assist their children or can contemplate what can be done with their "estate". For the minority of this cohort who never made it into home ownership and had less secure access to the job market, they continue to be asset poor and dependent on their state pension. It is this group which will feel the greatest impact of new housing policies.

The policy changes give them the promise of more choices of accommodation. However this is dependent upon the market responding and providing suitable accommodation at an affordable price, such a response cannot be guaranteed. Thus the apparent "choices" may remain an illusion. (My emphasis editor of Ecoso).

The final cohort, that of the rising generation, is one which entered the job and housing market during the 1970s and 1980s which in New Zealand have been decades of much less certain conditions, of booms and slumps in housing prices, of decreasing affordability, of falling real incomes and growing employment uncertainty. Accommodation has become more costly and returns from investments in housing less assured. The rising generation may well find that when they enter retirement next century they do so with much less capital than the present one and at a time when the squeeze will be on state pensions as the working age population contracts and the retired expands.

In the 2020s New Zealand could well be faced with both income and housing problems amongst the retired population unless the path of change is recognised and policies are framed which ensure both the supply of an appropriate form of housing and an access to system which avoids poverty traps and recognises the differential life experiences of those moving into retirement.

The current desire to allow the market a larger role whilst not without its merit needs to be tempered with recognition that there will always be a place for a well managed public system to fill the gaps left and to provide a stimulus to innovation in physical design, social arrangements and community based support. (My emphasis Editor of Ecoso).

## Old Age - Nothing So Unforeseen

*Nothing should be more expected than old age :  
nothing is more unforeseen.*

Simone de Beauvoir.

(Note from Editor. This article is based on a paper by Richard Mohr which was prepared as the keynote address to the 1987 National Conference on Behavioural Medicine. Despite the years that have passed it is republished in this Ecoso as the issues it deals with are still current. The whole paper is in the Crow Collection.)

It is estimated that by the year 2000 there will be only a slight increase in the proportion of the population over 65 years, however, thanks to recent increases in life expectancy at the older end of the age range, there will be a higher proportion of people aged over 75 years. Thus an increase in the "frailer old people."

The changes in the economy and the changes in work practises are resulting in a decrease in the proportion of older people participating in the workforce.

What does it mean to get old ? Richard Mohr answers this question by describing four dimensions of old age...what he calls *the main coordinates along which the very variable characteristics of older people are ranged*. Here is a precis of his four points :-

### Four Dimensions of Ageing

1. *The economic dimension*. For the great majority of us ageing means retiring and that means that our regular income ceases. Some have "nest eggs" but almost twenty years ago the Henderson Report on Poverty pointed out that the number of elderly poor people was increasing.

2. *Retirement as reduced activity*. Retirement, for some, is like being thrown on the scrap heap than going on a long holiday. To quote Simone de Beauvoir; *Giving up our occupation does not mean reaching idle pleasure we have been deprived of....if we drag too many memories with us it is because our visions are no longer given life by fresh projects*.

3. *Dependency*. In old age even our dependencies are often not new ones. The terrible difference is that the people we depend on may not be there. Old men in particular are often in need of help with domestic tasks. Old women are often unused to making decisions. Both men and women tend to find themselves taken care of to an unnecessary degree and rapidly losing everyday living skills. Thus to the existing dependencies of a lifetime there is added the new dependency of "captive care".

4. *Specifying Needs for Care*. Many needs of elderly people are incredibly common sense and self evident (despite the fact that they may not be accurately identified)...For example physical needs with changing light bulbs, podiatry and small home alterations such as ramps. There are also the psychological needs some of which result from long ingrained

habits such as possessiveness about home privacy which may result in rejection of home help. Such fixed habits need to be confronted by the elderly person as well as the carer.

Rick Mohr emphasises that; As people become more able to identify and meet specific needs, we may be able to move away from the equation of care with institutional care, with bricks and mortar, with the nursing home on the hill and meet real individual needs with realistic solutions.

### Avoiding Dependency in Old Age

Here is a full quote from part of Rick Mohr's conclusions :-

*If we are serious about avoiding dependency in old age, we need to address the issue in all its aspects. The opposite of dependency is power : power over ones own life, over the choice and range of options available.*

*People are dependent, not because they are old, but because they have spent much of their lives learning to be dependent. To empower people, old or young, we need to provide opportunities for exercising some power, some informed choices. An approach that values independence must inform the way our services are run, and should begin with the way they are planned.*

*One of the best ways of encouraging the public to look further than the nearest nursing home when they look for care is to help them to them to plan alternatives to nursing homes in the form of Home and Community Care services. Even though consultative planning may be messy, chaotic and conflict ridden, even though it may be uncomfortable for governments, it is good for people. Consultation does not just happen, it must be resourced with information, with time, and with some sensitive processes that allow the inarticulate to speak without feeling like fools, and which promote the broad participation of consumers above that of service providers.*

### Competing Interests

*Planning must be aware of its role in adjudicating between competing interests such as the rich aged and the poor aged and the retirement industry entrepreneurs. Planning instruments should not - indeed could not- be neutral between these interests, and must be judged according to their success in promoting the appropriate interests.*

**Subscription Form for Ecoso Exchange Newsletter**  
Subscription \$10 for 7 Issues

Name .....phone no.....

Address.....post code.....

Send to Crow Collection, C/o Sheila Byard, Victoria  
University of Technology, Box 14428, MMC Melbourne 3000.

## Community Housing ? Public Housing ? What's in a Name ?

*Part of the submission from the Housing for Aged Action Group to the Industry Commission's Inquiry on Public Housing. September 1993. This section was prepared by Ruth Crow.*

The Housing for Aged Action Group (HAAG) welcomes the Federal Government's initiatives to reform how housing is negotiated and to improve efficiencies within the state housing authorities. However, HAAG asks :-

Will the community and social housing sector be increased at the expense of a diminished public housing sector ?

### I. Housing - the Federal Government's Framework

The policies in the *National Housing Strategy, Agenda for Action*, the *1992/93 Budget Overview* and the *1993/94 Budget Overview* outline the Federal Government's policies for social and community housing. In all these documents public housing tends to be subsumed under the heading of community or social housing. This is also the case in ALP policies, for example, in the 1992 ALP report "Affordable Homes in Livable Cities".

#### 1.A. Defining Public Housing

HAAG points out that it is very necessary to regard public housing as a distinct category.

Its distinctive features are :-

- a. It is owned or under the full proprietorship of federal, state or local government;
- b. It is available exclusively for rental accommodation;
- c. It is occupied under a tenancy agreement which establishes rental on the basis of capacity to pay;
- d. It is rented with guaranteed tenure for the duration of the tenants need.

#### 1.B. Categories of Government Subsidised Housing

HAAG emphasises the need to define different categories of government subsidised housing by stating how they are owned and managed, identifying 4 forms of government subsidised housing :-

- a. Public rental housing, owned and managed by government housing authorities;
- b. Community managed housing owned by government housing authorities and managed by a variety of groups;
- c. Community owned and managed rental housing, owned by



community based corporate structures and managed by community based management groups;

d. Community owned rental housing managed by State Housing Authorities

### 1.C. Consequences of Social and Community Housing Policies

Social and community housing policies focus on the objectives of housing rather than on who owns the housing stock. Superficially this seems to be an admirable objective HAAG, however, is concerned about three consequences :-

a. A long term transformation of public housing to a housing option only for the disadvantaged minority groups;

b. An increase in government subsidies to private home owners;

c. The development of private housing at the expense of public housing.

## 2. Housing for Elderly People - the Federal Government's Framework

### 2.A. Special Opportunities for Elderly People

The National Housing Strategy document *Housing for older Australians : Affordability, Adjustments and Care* (page 45) describes the "special opportunities" offered to elderly people through social housing :-

*First, more than any other group, many older people have some housing assets that can go towards the provision of more appropriate housing as their needs change. Private capital can thus be drawn on from individuals rather than through finance institutions. Second, by mobilising capital from previous housing assets, social housing can offer options to older people that they would not be able to achieve in the market place. For example social housing projects can include features in the social and physical environment that are not generally available in housing offered in the general market. Third, resident involvement in management structures can go well beyond the role of residents committee established in some retirement villages where financial control is exercised by the owner of the enterprise.*

### 2.B. Main Concerns About Social Housing for Elderly

HAAG has four main concerns about social housing for the elderly :-

a. Asset rich elderly people may not be a permanent feature of our society.

b. The generation of Australians who reached adulthood in

the prosperous post war years have had their home ownership subsidised in a number of different ways.

c. Subsidies are given to for social housing regardless of the economic need.

d. Subsidies to social housing reduces finance available for public housing.

## 2.C. Innovations in Housing for the Elderly

The document *Changing Places - Case Studies of Innovations in Housing for Older People* (Ann Forsyth, August 1992) is a report prepared for the Federal Government's Mid Term review of Aged Care Reform.

This document focuses on recent innovations in servicing, financing and managing housing for older Australians, giving examples from all over Australia. There is no doubt that these initiatives have increased housing choice and some of the funding can be justified because of the pioneering which was necessary. However, HAAG agrees with the Industry Commission's statement in its *Overview* :-

*In Chapter 9, the Commission considers whether community housing is an effective alternative to public housing. However, the issue cannot be resolved until there is proper accounting of all savings and costs, and until the costs of promoting and maintaining community housing are separated from housing assistance.*

## 2. D. Public Image of Public Housing

The vast majority of housing innovations described in documents published by the Federal Government (the National Housing Strategy, the Mid Term Review Reports) appear to be from the social housing sector.

This provokes three questions :-

a. Is there some barrier preventing the public sector housing from becoming innovative ?

b. If there are barriers how can these be overcome so that public housing tenants can enjoy similar opportunities to those living in social housing ?

c. Why have the improvements in the way public housing has been provided in the past decade not lead to an improved public image ?

## 2.E. Popularising Public Housing

There needs to be positive discrimination in popularising the opportunities that are provided by public housing. This is needed for three reasons :-

a. To give more dignity to the tenants.

b. To provide balanced information to the public.

c. To encourage local government and other authorities to work more confidently with public housing tenants in the planning and delivering of local services.

.....  
Bits and Pieces

Mary Gilmore and Educating Children in a Utopian Settlement.

Mary Gilmore's portrait will soon be on our ten dollar note. As many people know she was one of the idealist, intrepid Australians who went to Paraguay to establish a utopian settlement called "Cosme". The masthead of the settlement's newspaper, "Cosme Monthly", described the it as a **Co-operative Settlement of English speaking people holding as principles Communism - Home-Living and Teetotalism**. The front page of the Cosme Monthly also had the slogan **They must be ever on and upward who would keep abreast of truth.**

In 1901, in its seventh year of publication, "Cosme Monthly" Mary Gilmore enthusiastically described the Cosme School. There is a facsimile of this article in the collection of some of Mary's poems, essays and stories in "**Mary Gilmore - A Tribute**" by Dymphana Cussack. Here is an extract :-

*Cosme students have no seniors to transmit codes of honour nor the rules of recurring seasonal games and are not urged on by competition with an adjoining school or the manifold tales of past victories and defeats - there are no prizes or scholarships to overstrain young effort.*

*The poverty of hunger and filth and drunkenness - the wealth of yachts and mansions - gambling and praying - the brutality of "out of work" and "under pay" are impossible pictures to the children.*

*Here in the playground, in the grassy and weedy streets new rules of "fair" and "unfair" are being formed: the sole guide being the impressions gained from their parents in this effort to adjust personal and communal rights under conditions of a new environment.*

.....  
Children's Art and the Crow Collection

Don't miss the exhibition of aboriginal children's art now showing at the Museum of Victoria. It is called the Nyungar Landscapes.

In 1952 Mary Durack Miller wrote a book called "Child Artists of the Australian Bush" about the deprived lives of these children, who were virtually in a prison, and the way their art flourished when a sympathetic teacher recognised their talents. This book is in the Crow Collection.

The Collection also has books of children's art from Hungary, Rumania, China and Germany, and an essay by Ailsa O'Connmor on the historic Asian Australian Art Exchange in the mid 1950s.

## **The Birth of the Shop Committees in the 1930s**

Tony Restarick's Memories Continued from Ecoso 2/27

In last Ecoso (2/27) Tony wrote about the effects on working conditions of the introduction of the "spot system" or "taylorism" into the Railway Workshops. His story ended with the statement "It was into this industrial turmoil that the shop committee was born." Here is our next instalment :-

### **A Stormy Birth**

The shop committee had a stormy birth. It was the brain child of E.J. "Teddy" Rowe. Teddy was born at Italian Gully near Ballarat and had a state school education topped off with two years at the Junior Technical School. He started as an apprentice turner and fitter at the Ballarat North Shops in 1922.

After leaving school he joined the Catholic Young Men's Society (CYMS) where he became the brightest star in all forms of public speaking. He joined the Labor Party and a bright future was predicted for this brilliant young orator.

However he fell out with the official Labor Party over the question of the Premier's Plan (ed. see Ecoso 2/27) and was expelled from the ALP in 1931. He immediately joined the Communist Party and became its chief spokesman in Ballarat.

Although only slightly built he was a dynamo of activity, a good organiser and an avid reader. He was quick to assimilate any subject he undertook.

Also he was full of guts and determination, a worthy opponent of Grimshaw and Co. (ed. see Ecoso 2/27).

### **The 1928 Resolution on Shop Committees**

As far as I know he was responsible for discovering the importance of a resolution carried by the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) at their conference in 1928 providing for the setting up of shop committees in work places to combine the activities of all unions in those shops to further the aims of the trade rather than on a craft basis and although it had been ACTU policy for a number of years the shop committee at Ballarat was first established in the Railways, probably the first Shop Committee in Victoria and possibly the first in Australia.

Teddy Rowe called the first meeting and explained the idea, then meetings were held in each a shop and a delegate was elected from each shop irrespective of the union to which he belonged. These delegates met and elected officers and drew up a constitution and the shop committee was on its way.

In the first shop committee the president was Hughie Cook (car shop) secretary, Teddy Rowe (fitting shop) and delegates A.C. Black (boiler shop), J.C. Wight (tenders) Tony Restarick

(truck), W. Irvin (coppershop), Bill Kilgour (blacksmiths), A. Temby (motion bench) and W. Walton (under gear).

### **No Enthusiasm from Union Official**

The shop committee was received with no enthusiasm from the official unions in the shops and was rejected out of hand by Grimshaw who refused to have any dealings with it what so ever.

But since it was official ACTU policy the committee pushed its claims for recognition through the Ballarat Trades and Labour Council (TLC) to the Melbourne Trades Hall Council (THC) to the ACTU itself, representations were made by these bodies to the Railway Staff Board and finally recognition was granted and Grimshaw was instructed to deal with the Shop Committee.

We received this advice and our grapevine being better than theirs found out that Grimshaw was furious with the decision and requested the Staff Board to transfer Teddy Rowe to some other workshop.

The reply rejecting this request pointed out, with some logic, that the trouble had begun and transferring Rowe would only spread it further. Grimshaw was to deal with the Shop Committee. and try to confine its activities to Ballarat.

First round to Teddy Rowe and the Shop committee. A mass meeting was called and complaints were asked for, and there were plenty !

### **The Fight for a Drinking Tap**

However the issue selected to fight the second round was a demand for the drinking tap in the truck shop.

In this day and age it seems almost unbelievable that such an amenity would have to be requested.

(Ecoso readers will have to wait to Ecoso 2/29 to read about the successful campaign for a drinking tap and other basic amenities. Some Ecoso readers may be interested to know that Alan Ratcliff (who now lives in Preston) went to school with Tony Restarick and was apprenticed at the Ballarat North Railways Works Shops the same year as Tony and worked with him during the years described in these memoirs.)  
.....

## **Sharing An Appreciation**

In recent weeks a number of secondary students have used the Crow Collection for VCE projects. Here is part of a letter Ruth Crow received from one of them.

*You helped me gain a much better understanding of the many problems encountered when examining history. The primary sources you gave me and especially your own thoughts as a contrast to secondary and media representation became a focus of my essay. I was most grateful for your assistance. I, for one, owe a lot to the Crow Collection !*  
.....

Reproduction of an article which was published in the Victoria University of Technology's newsletter "Nexus", May 10th 1993.

Errata : In the 2nd paragraph of 4th column in the sixth line the number should be "1" not "5". (Level 1. is the dependent category).

# Is wealth a well-spent age?

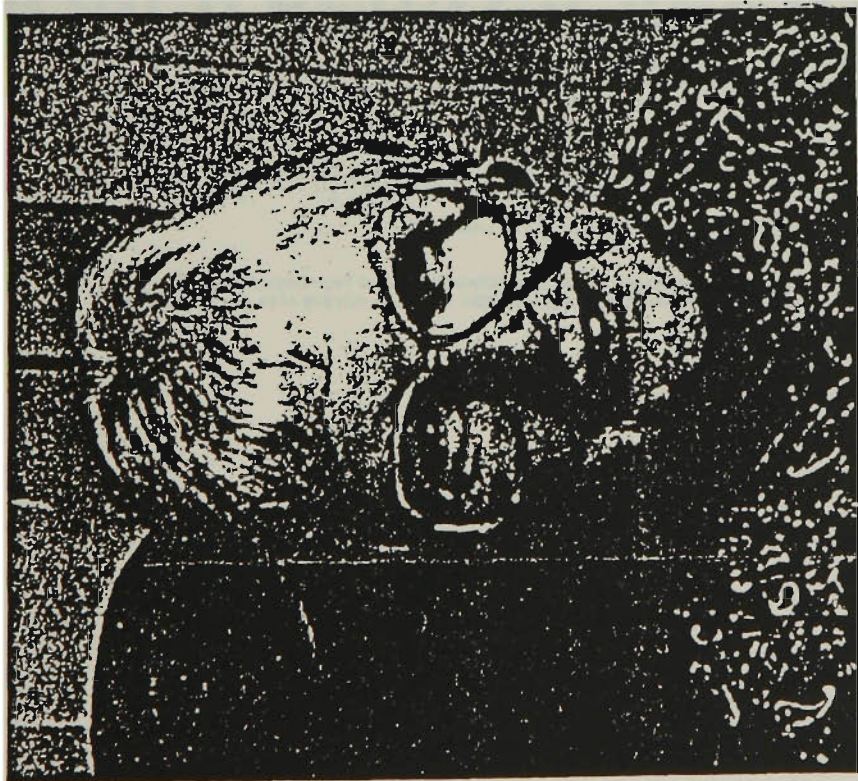
By Professor Ann Woodruff

If Campian is correct in his claim that the upright man's wealth is a well-spent age, Victorians may be facing additional poverty.

The response of Victorian nurses to proposed changes in staffing regulations for nursing homes has been publicised in recent weeks. The background to this change needs clarification, if for no other reason than that we are all heading toward being part of the aged population. The mooted reduction in staffing levels and staff qualifications seems once more to demonstrate a misguided perception of the nature of professional nursing care. Those proposing change seem to hold a view which sees nursing care as a purely ongoing custodial activity, able to be provided (at least for the aged) by anyone presumed to be of good intent, and at minimum cost.

The number of aged persons in Australia is increasing rapidly and the associated cost of caring for a dependent population is of concern to governments, and the funding of nursing homes and hostels is being targeted for cost containment. The funding arrangements for nursing homes and nursing home beds in larger hospitals are subject to a formula which was proposed to ensure skilled care, therapy and rehabilitation. Like many best laid plans, this seems to be "gang(ing) aft o-gley."

In 1986, a Federal Government report recommended a change in funding arrangements for nursing homes, which was introduced to



the private sector in 1987-8, and later, to the publicly funded nursing homes in Australia. The system has become known by the acronym CAM/SAM/OCRE. The Care Aggregated Module is funded to cover nursing and personal care staff costs, estimated by placing residents into one of five categories, depending upon their level of dependency. Each level attracts a set number of hours of care per day at a predetermined rate per hour. For example, Level 1, the most dependent category attracts 3.86

hours per day, or \$569.04 per week; with Level 5, the least dependent, 1.29 hours, or \$191.34 per week. Eight per cent of CAM funding is expected to be devoted to buying services of psychologists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, etc.

Standard Aggregated Module relates to items associated with the conduct of the care facility, such as meals, general maintenance, rates, land tax, food services, laundry, etc. It is from this module that profit should be derived.

The last, Other Cost Reimbursed Expenditure, is included in the fee structure, and covers long service leave, superannuation, workcare and payroll tax for all staff. As one of the prime objectives of the system is to encourage rehabilitation, or to maintain existing levels of activity, success is gauged by the achievement of the goals contained in the Outcome Standards for Australian Nursing Homes.

The CAM component of funding is based upon an annual assessment of residents' dependency category, and in respect nursing homes, Level 5 - the more profitable - have been popular. As money not spent must be returned to the Federal Government, and quality care and therapy more than occupies the hours stated, it should be uncommon for there to be a surplus. Though it has been whispered that due to judicious investments of CAM funding on the short-term money market, some \$91,000,000 was returned in Australia last year - obviously some miscalculations!) A new threat has now arisen in the guise of the Victorian Government's recent publication of its intention to amend the Health Services (Residential Care) Regulations 1991, Numbers 504 - Minimum Staff and 505 - Qualifications of Nursing Staff.

Present regulations mandate a ratio of one registered nurse (three or four year preparation) to each 10 residents during the day, and to each 15 at night. The remainder of personal care staff must be enrolled (one year prepared) nurses. The proprietor must ensure that no less than one-third of the staff on any shift are registered general nurses, preferably with postgraduate qualifications and experience in gerontological nursing. The proposed amendments would require only one registered nurse (not neces-

sarily a general nurse) to each nursing home (irrespective of size). The remainder of the staff involved in personal care, and covered by CAM funding, need have no training, experience nor qualification. The argument put by the Victorian Government (possibly with some Commonwealth urging?) is that savings on qualified nursing staff will be able to be spent on the services of other allied health professionals - which should already be covered by the eight per cent component of CAM funding.

To give one example of the probable effect of a change to untrained staff in nursing homes: it is reported that at least 60 per cent of nursing home residents in Australia have moderate to severe dementia and associated cognitive and behavioural disturbances. These residents require skilled, around-the-clock nursing care and therapy, which cannot be provided by untrained, albeit less costly, "personal care attendants." In the publication Commonwealth Nursing Home Outcome Standards (1992) it is stated that "professional skills are required by the nursing homes if the minimum levels of expertise described in the outcome standards are to be met." The new staffing proposals tend, instead, to conjure up a picture of a return to Bedlam-like conditions of restraint and aversion "therapy," locking any hope or expectation of palliation or improvement. Victoria's nurses intend to fight what they see as a diminution of standards of care for the aged in this State, and have already gained from the Minister an agreement for a "return to the drawing board." For all our sakes, it is imperative that the progress of these proposals be followed by all who have care and concern for the future of aged care in Victoria.

# Victories of a Merri band

**T**HE progress of a lone swamp wallaby along the banks of a Melbourne creek as it headed for open parkland caused a great deal of excitement in various conservation camps this winter.

Three times in June the wallaby was sighted: first in Coburg, then in Northcote, and finally in the Yarra Bend park, which is only a few bops over four kilometres from the GPO.

The return of a wallaby to the partly restored pushland corridor of the Merri Creek, past dogs, pedestrians, cars and dustbins and all the other elements of urban hostility, marks a great moment in an environmental battle that has been going on for a quarter of a century. It means the Merri Creek is coming back to life after 150 years of abuse and neglect.

Had it not been for the tenacity of various citizens' groups who refused to back down from a fight for the creek, the waterway might today have been little more than a dirty stream running down a concrete drain beneath the shadows of the F2 Freeway.

It was only when the freeway loomed as a threat, not only to the creek but also to the last vestiges of open space in the park-starved northern suburbs, that locals got together. They fought the freeway proposal and won.

Then, according to one of the original campaigners and present vice-president of the Friends of the Merri Creek association, Bruce McGregor, residents started to ask for something more. They wanted parkland.

And that meant the banks of the Merri Creek.



## MILLO'S DIARY

BOB MILLINGTON

**T**HERE were countless deputations to authorities and funding bodies. Says Bruce McGregor: "If they gave us excuses we'd give them plans. If they said they didn't have any money, we'd go out and find some. We didn't just disappear because someone gave us the cold shoulder."

Over 20 years, he estimates, that campaigning has brought \$10 million into the restoration scheme.

This translates as 50,000 indigenous trees, 40 hectares of land, a 21-kilometre pathway from Thomasdown to the Yarra, and a series of former industrial dump sites landscaped as shady parkland.

The real turning point occurred three years ago when a professional management team was brought in.

As far as Bruce McGregor knows, this team of six professionals and 14 Job Skills support staff — financed to the tune of \$500,000 a year by five local councils — is unique in Australia.

For all the achievements, however, Bruce McGregor says the battle is only half won. The long view is that it will take 50 years to restore the Merri. The water, a nasty cocktail of industrial seep-

age and street litter, precludes all but the hardiest creatures from existing anywhere south of Bell Street.

**B**UT back to the wallaby. Yarra Bend park ranger Greg Mulr says droppings were found last week on the other side of the river in Kew.

"We don't know whether it crossed the footbridge, swam or went via Dight's Falls," he said. The question now is, can the wallaby hold on against the foxes and dogs on the red brick side of the Yarra?

## Along the Creeks and Over the Mountains

Occasionally a group of Crow Collection supporters go for a bush or urban walk. If you would like to come on some of them please phone Ruth 380.1876. On our urban walks we follow the creeks and our bush walks are in the Dandenongs. We use public transport to get to starting point



## The Crow Collection Association (Incorp.) A Living Library to Plan for the 21st Century

C/- Ms. Sheila Byard, Lecturer, Urban Studies Unit, Victoria University of Technology (Footscray)  
PO Box 14428, MMC, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia 3000 Telephone: (03) 688 4754 Fax: (03) 688 4801