



## OMEP AUSTRALIA World organisation for Early Childhood Education

Organisation Mondiale pour l'Éducation Préscolaire  
World Organisation for Early Childhood Education  
Organización Mundial para la Educación Preescolar

National Newsletter

April 2009

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### PRESIDENT'S GREETINGS TREVOR FEDER

#### Presidents Report: April 2009

Greetings to all OMEP Members for 2009.

Many people throughout Australia have experienced a traumatic start to the year with devastating fires in Victoria and floods in Queensland. Looking back through my life I can recall some very horrific events which affected many people at the time and for years into the future; I am sure all of you can do the same. We all know that the future of the nation depends upon the strength of adults and families, but coupled with this it rests with supporting children at the time of trauma and for many following years. Whilst there has been (and still is) a tremendous response to immediate challenges faced by families and children it is the longer term prospects which are likely to be extraordinarily challenging and complex. Previously the OMEP Board discussed the possibility of a national project focussing on capacity building relating to Australia's indigenous people. An advantage of a small organisation like OMEP Australia is that it can adapt to make a relatively quick response to essential needs and as a result of the devastation in two states of Australia it is proposed to defer the national project on indigenous capacity building and focus on dealing with traumas and children affected by them.

I know the Victorian Chapter has already responded with care-bags and the South Australian Chapter has committed to providing assistance to a home based support group for children in the fire ravaged area of Pheasant Creek. Other OMEP Chapters or individual members may have responded to the needs of individuals or groups in either Queensland or Victoria or may know of others who need the type of assistance which OMEP Australia could offer.

With regard to the proposed constitution, advice was received from Maddocks solicitor suggesting that as OMEP has not approved or passed the draft constitution that OMEP not proceed with its application for DGR endorsement advice but may consider lodging an application for endorsement as a DGR when its constitution has been approved and passed. The Board will continue to work on the proposed constitution with intention of presenting it at the next annual general meeting.

Currently we have four active chapters in OMEP Australia; New South Wales, South Australia, Victoria and Western Australia as well as individual members in other states and territories. The newsletter contains reports from the chapters and indicates the dedication of members and the work in which each chapter has been engaged; we would gratefully welcome any contributions or information from individual members.

I wish you well for the remainder of 2009.

Trevor Feder

**WORKING FOR THE CHILDREN OF THE WORLD**

**NEW SOUTH WALES NEWS**

While not an OMEP NSW Project, collaborations and government support, allowed eight organisations to offer two professional development opportunities that highlighted best practice internationally.

Professor Iram Siraj-Blatchford (University of London) and professor Collette Taylor (University of Melbourne) Frameworks and Foundations: When only the BEST will do.

Dr Ronald Lally, (WestEd, San Francisco, USA) Sydney Birth to Five Briefing: Infants, Toddlers and Preschoolers, Developmental Competencies and Vulnerabilities: the implications for Policies and Programs.

Practices that lead to good outcomes and lasting benefits for social. Behavioural and intellectual development for children were discussed, such as staff training, type and quality of adult interactions, play routines, types and qualities of leadership and the optimum balance between care and education. The value of the home learning environment was emphasised. The events were provocative and insightful.

**Diane Duval, Director , New South Wales Chapter**

**National President**  
Trevor Feder  
Trevor.feder@unisa.edu.au

**Directors**

**South Australia**  
Marilyn Webb  
mtwebb@optusnet.com.au

**Western Australia**

**New South Wales**  
Diane Duvall  
Dianeduvall@yahoo.com

**Victoria**  
Shayne Collins

**Please Note**  
Both the State Chapter reports and individual contributions to the Back Pages section of the Newsletter reflect the diversity of events and concerns across Australia. It is recognised that the views these represent are not necessarily shared by all OMEP members; they are included in the spirit of mutual respect

Materials for OMEP newsletters may be sent direct  
to  
Anne Carrington by email:  
anne.carrington@unisa.edu.au

OMEPA Correspondence Website: [www.omepaaustralia.com.au](http://www.omepaaustralia.com.au)  
PO Box 356  
Burnside SA 5066 Email: [info@omepaaustralia.com.au](mailto:info@omepaaustralia.com.au)

## NEWS FROM SOUTH AUSTRALIA

### Chapter Project 2008. Clean Water for the Children of Cambodia.

As reported in the December newsletter the chapter received a heart warming response from teachers, carers and OMEP members, to our appeal for support for wells to provide clean, safe water for Cambodian communities, through the work of Oxfam teams on the ground in Cambodia. The work done in schools and centres on and around Universal Children's Day elicited a hugely diverse response both to the topic and the approach to fund raising.

#### Participants:

One individual family

OMEP members

Primary schools: Keithcot Farm ( SRC ), Sturt Street ( Early Learning Centre ), Virginia ( whole school ).

Community Children's Centres, Kindergartens, Pre-Schools: Aberfoyle Park ( The Hub ), Balaklava,

Brighton South ( Dover ), Broadview ( St Philips ), City West, Craigmore, Elizabeth East, Enfield Folland Park, Flagstaff Hill, Flagstaff Oval, Mount Gambier ( Gladigau Park ), Lockleys, Mitcham., Mitcham Village, Netherby, Nuriootpa, Prospect, Reynella ( Mary Bywaters ), Salisbury Downs ( Riverview ), St Georges ( J.B.Cleland ), Salisbury Heights, Tailem Bend, Thorndon Park, Unley.

Beyond OMEP members, there were 28 community groups participating in the project. A rough calculation would suggest that something like 2000 children benefited from learning a little about caring for others.

**\$5130 was provided toward the building of 38 wells** to assist families in 38 communities in Cambodia. The question was raised as to whether the water supplies might be contaminated. The OMEP SA committee is advised by Oxfam that water sources serving South East Asian communities along the Mekong River are often contaminated with arsenic and other undesirable agents. Water sources for all wells installed by Oxfam are therefore thoroughly tested..

### Goats for the Children of the World

Regular readers of this newsletter could be forgiven for thinking that in South Australia we are totally fixated on goats! Nonetheless we thought you may be interested in the excerpt from a recent Oxfam leaflet, which demonstrates just what a difference the gift of a goat can make to the life and future of an impoverished family.

### Projects for 2009

Chapter members, along with other Australians and people everywhere, have been appalled by the immensity of the tragedy suffered in the February bushfires in Victoria, followed so closely by flood and cyclone in Queensland. We plan to follow the board suggestion that OMEP this year, should assist in the rebuilding of early childhood services in Victoria, once it is known what extra help is needed. In the mean time we are assisting a developing play group at Pheasant Creek, near Kinglake.

The chapter has recently been the grateful recipient of a large and beautiful collection of musical instruments, from music therapist and teacher, Marie Reynolds. The instruments will be shared between the Play Centre at Hampstead School, which has previously been supported by this chapter, and which is attended by several Warlbiri children who have come to Adelaide from the Northern Territory, and the Pheasant Creek Play Group.

**South Australian members send wishes for strength and peace** to all who must learn to live with the memory of terror, of people, pets and places lost, of wildlife and livestock destroyed in tragedy.

**Merilyn Webb, Director, SA**

## NEWS FROM VICTORIA

All Victorians are reeling from the devastation that has occurred to so many communities in our state. The destruction and its speed has left so many families homeless and grieving for lost families, pets, housing, livelihoods and entire communities. At the recent national day of mourning, Aunty Joy Murphy, a Wurundjeri elder told how her people would scorch the land every seven years for "cleansing and regrowth", but Black Saturday was "torture of the land". Every Victorian has been reminded in grief of the fragility of life and has seen first hand, the strength and hope generated by communities when they pull towards a common goal.

The Chapter committee has met in December, February and will meet again in March. Plans are in place for the first half of the year and we are keen to interest the friends of members to consider joining OMEP as a way of supporting children and their families.

The first occasion is a visit to the new children's centre that was recently opened above a Safeway supermarket, right in the heart of the city. This exciting new development is the result of a number of partnerships and is a new Gowrie Victoria centre. Look out for the invitation to join with friends and colleagues in March.

For a great many years, Vera Scantelbury Brown scholarships have been awarded to kindergarten teachers, maternal and child health nurses and paediatricians to enable them to further their studies. Who was Vera Scantelbury Brown? Are the scholarships still available? What happened to the winners of these scholarships? We are hoping to have a session where we will hear more so look out for further information about this event – probably happening in May.

The committee has many ideas for projects and following the terrible fires, more opportunities to help will arise- knitting rainbow scarves and beanies, making dolls clothes, home corner bed linen, dress ups for the three kindergartens which have been totally destroyed. There is a lot to be done once families move past this initial shocked phase. The committee has already responded by providing back packs and other goods to children in the Yea community – which were gladly received by the school principal for distribution!

Thanks to all OMEP members Australia wide for their good wishes. We in turn want you all to know that our concern flows to fellow Australians in Queensland, where the horror of destruction by water has wreaked such havoc.

If you have any ideas drop us a line at PO Box 1194, Surrey Hills North. VIC 3127.

VALE Betty Sommerville See Page 6

From Sue Harper

## NEWS FROM WESTERN AUSTRALIA

### School Starter Kits

For the thirteenth successive year, school starter kits were distributed to needy children for the start of the school year. Library bags, pens, stickers and frisbees were donated by the Swan River Trust. Picture books were donated by McMillans and the school requisites of scrapbooks, glue, scissors, coloured and lead pencils were donated by Wooldridge Superstores. Dawn and Bryce Butterworth packaged 180 kits for post by the Department of Education and Training to rural and remote areas of WA, while other executive members hand delivered the remaining 100 kits to schools throughout the metropolitan area. Again, it was a magnificent cooperative effort by WA members and expressions of thanks poured in from appreciative recipients.

### Refugee Welcoming Kits

A further 12 kits have been prepared by Ann Taylor for distribution to children through the PMH refugee children's clinic, while a quantity of soft toys has been donated to the Fremantle Multicultural Resource Centre. A bag of novels suitable for teenagers has been donated to the teen ward of PMH and four school starter kits presented to an orphanage in Jakarta.

### International Women's Day Expo

On March 8, whilst serving on a stall for National Council of Women (WA), Dawn took the opportunity to publicise OMEP and to hand out membership brochures.

### Advocacy

We listened to Kerry Blom, Coordinator of Grandcare, speak about the many grandparents caring full time for their grandchildren because their parents are unable to do so due to incarceration, drug addiction or incapacitation. Many of these grandparents are seniors and have their own health and financial problems. It occurred to us that OMEP Aust should consider putting up a resolution urging the relevant Ministers in each state/territory to ensure that these grandparents receive monetary support, at least equivalent to the amount paid to foster carers.

### Planning

Tuesday, March 17<sup>th</sup> saw the full executive component of OMEP WA meeting to plan an exciting series of events for each month of 2009. The first for the year is a Sundowner planned for April 28<sup>th</sup> for members and guests to watch the sun go down over the Swan River while sipping mulled wine and enjoying camaraderie at the Butterworth home.

**VALE Mary Folkl** please see Page 6

**Dr Dawn Butterworth (President, OMEP WA)**

## VALE

## Betty Sommerville - Victoria

Long time Victorian member Betty Sommerville died on December 22, 2008 aged 87 years. Betty maintained her OMEP membership over many years and was well known as the author of the *John and Betty* series of readers used to teach many children to read. It was always assumed that Betty was in fact the Betty in the readers but the identity of John was never revealed!

Betty was an unassuming woman who in retirement became involved with the Victorian Free Kindergarten Union as President. A keen traveller, Betty was an avid sender of postcards from all over the world. Betty was awarded an Australian Centenary Medal. She will be sadly missed.

From Sue Harper, Victoria.

## VALE

## Mary Folkl—Western Australia

Mary Folkl, life member of OMEP Australia, passed away on December 16, aged 92 years. After rescuing her emaciated soldier husband from Budapest and escaping to Austria with her 5 year old son during WW2, Mary eventually migrated to WA in 1950 where she proceeded to make a very significant contribution to early childhood education.

On returning from the OMEP Congress in Stockholm in 1964, Mary became the WA liaison officer for OMEP. As a result of her many fund raising efforts, the first mobile kindergarten was set up in State housing areas in Perth in 1969, and the first scholarship for an Aboriginal student to study early childhood education was established. In 1993 following the death of her beloved grandson, Mary published the little children's book that he had written called *Roland Rabbit Travels the World*, in order to honour his memory and with all proceeds going to benefit sick children. As a result of Mary's persistence and hard work selling the book, much needed medical equipment was donated to Princess Margaret and Peel Hospitals, while therapeutic play materials were given to the children's wards of Fremantle and Joondaloo Hospitals - all in the name of OMEP.

Mary possessed a awesome resiliency, believing that anything and everything was possible. It was just a matter of dogged determination—putting one's head down and forging ahead until one's goals were reached. It is this indomitable spirit that is perhaps Mary's greatest legacy and which should serve as inspiration to us all.

From Dr Dawn Butterworth, WA.



Publication:  
*Sowing Seeds of Peace: Australia and the World Organisation for early Childhood Education* by Joan Waters

This book is about the development of OMEP in Australia and the involvement and influence of Australians in World Assemblies and Council Meetings.

Cost: Aus \$20 Including Postage within Australia

### Talking with their hands - Gestures help to explain the linguistic class divide

Even before they start school, children from wealthy backgrounds know more words than those from poor families. According to a study published in *Science* last week, this might not be simply because their parents use a larger vocabulary: the learning of gestures may be just as important.

Anyone who has raised children will recognise that they communicate with gestures long before their linguistic capacity expands beyond happy gurgles and despairing caterwauls. The extent of this early gesturing behaviour is believed to predict later vocabulary skill. Meredith Rowe and Susan Goldin-Meadow from the University of Chicago spent months poring over 75 hours of video footage from 50 families with toddlers. They catalogued all the different gestures used by parents and children, finding that if the parents used more gestures, the toddlers were likely to follow suit. Furthermore, when the children's vocabulary was assessed three years later, those who had used a greater variety of gestures at 14 months also knew more words at the age of four and a half.

Most interesting, however, was the fact that both parents and toddlers from more privileged families used more gestures. The subjects of the study were chosen to reflect the diversity of Chicago's population, and their socioeconomic status was measured as a combination of the parents' education level and household income. The gesturing of the parents and toddlers, together with the children's later vocabulary, all correlated with socioeconomic status. Might a bias in gesturing behaviour explain why school-age vocabulary varies across social strata?

Of course, since the authors only report correlations, they cannot claim that the more a baby gestures, the more words she will learn. Nevertheless, it is easy to imagine how such a link might work. A gesture can be used to convey a particular meaning before vocabulary is available – see, for example, the waving arms of a baby that wordlessly urge, "pick me up". Child psychologists have argued that such non-verbal communication lays the cognitive foundations for language. Gestures might also assist quite practically with vocabulary building. Once safely ensconced in a parental embrace, our toddler tests her fingers by tugging on the closest available facial hair; to this, her father responds by joining in, saying, "yes, that's Daddy's beard". Especially considering the utility of such pointing-and-naming games, a causative link between gesture usage and vocabulary size is entirely plausible.

Importantly, this link would also suggest that we can improve children's vocabulary – including children from disadvantaged families – by encouraging their parents to use plenty of gestures when they are young. Studies of school students have found that instructing them to gesture as they explain a tricky mathematical puzzle improves their problem-solving. As yet, however, there have been no experiments testing the direct influence of gesture on early language learning. Thus it may be premature for the Medicare to invest in a "gesticulate after you procreate" awareness campaign – but the current evidence suggests that when children are of language-learning age, there is no such thing as an empty gesture.

*By Jonathan Webb, Worcester College, Oxford*

### **Autism SA presents ...**

**'INSIGHTS & INNOVATIONS', A FAMILY ORIENTED CONFERENCE ON AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS**

Date: Thursday 28 and Friday 29 March 2009

Venue: Adelaide Festival Centre

On Thursday 28 and Friday 29 May 2009, Autism SA will be hosting a family oriented conference on Autism Spectrum Disorders at the Adelaide Festival Centre. The conference will be an opportunity for people from the Autism SA community to meet together to listen to insights and innovations from local and international speakers, including Carol Gray, the developer of 'Social Stories™' and 'Comic Strip Conversations'.

To register your interest in attending the conference please email [conference@autismsa.org.au](mailto:conference@autismsa.org.au).

For more information and to view the conference program please visit [www.autismasa.org.au](http://www.autismasa.org.au)

#### ***Interested in supporting the conference?***

Autism SA is on the lookout for 2009 Conference Partners and volunteers. If you would like further information in regards to these areas please email [conference@autismsa.org.au](mailto:conference@autismsa.org.au).

### **Early Childhood Intervention Expo –NSW**

The Early Childhood Intervention Coordination Program (ECICP) Greater Newcastle Sub Committee is hosting an EXPO for families and professionals:

Date: Wednesday 27th May 2009

Time: 10am-1pm

Venue: Cardiff RSL Club, 45 Macquarie Road, Cardiff

Cost: Free, courtesy of the ECICP (*funded by DADHC*)

#### **Guest Speakers**

**10.15-10.45 Dr Lee Sturgeon** (Clinical Consultant and developmental Psychologist)

*What are the early signs of Autism and how is it developed?*

**10.45-11.15 Jackie Currey** (Parent of a child with additional needs)

*A child with additional needs: a parent's journey*

**12.00-12.30 Chantelle Nissen** (Speech Pathologist, The Spastic Centre)

*The how and why of using visual supports to aid communication*

Representatives from a number of early childhood intervention services /agencies will be hosting display tables to provide up to date information that is appropriate to supporting young children ( birth to school entry age) with a disability, developmental delay or additional needs.

**Enquiries: Call the EIISCA office on 4925 7847**