



PHILANTHROPY  
*Australia*

## **“Preventing Child Abuse: A Way Forward”**

**A presentation by  
Prof. Dorothy Scott OAM, Foundation Chair in Child Protection and the  
Director of the Australian Centre for Child Protection at the University of  
South Australia  
to members of Philanthropy Australia in Sydney  
12 April 2007**

### **Welcome**

Peter Bly, Manager Philanthropic Services at Perpetual, welcomed Dorothy Scott and Philanthropy Australia Members and expressed Perpetual's pleasure at being able to host the seminar.

### **Introduction**

Grant Hooper, Manager, Membership Services, Philanthropy Australia thanked Peter for Perpetual's hospitality. He then welcomed Members of Philanthropy Australia and then introduced Prof. Dorothy Scott.

In introducing Dorothy, Grant informed Members that she is the current Foundation Chair in Child Protection and the Director of the Australian Centre for Child Protection (ACCP) at the University of South Australia. Before taking up this appointment in 2005 Dorothy was the Head of the School of Social Work at the University of Melbourne, and prior to that, the Executive Director of The Ian Potter Foundation - a Melbourne-based private philanthropic trust. Whilst in her role at the Potter Foundation, Dorothy also Chaired the Melbourne-based chapter of the Early Intervention Affinity Group.

Dorothy then spoke to a PowerPoint presentation which is available with these notes on the Philanthropy Australia website. These notes should be read in conjunction with the PowerPoint presentation.

### **Presentation**

As way of background Dorothy explained that she first got involved with social work as a volunteer at the age of about 15. This involvement helped shape her views on child abuse and neglect. She is a firm believer in the value of preventative actions. There is certainly a place for 'child rescue' and restorative services but she feels that preventative services such as those focused on strengthening the parent-child relationship are very powerful.

Dorothy also noted that it was important to think of children as 'beings' not just 'becomings'. That is, we often talk about the key benefit of preventative interventions being that they better enable children to go on to become healthy and productive members of the wider community in their adulthood. However, we should also remember that children are people and as such one of the key benefits of such interventions is that they improve the quality of life experienced by the children involved.

Dorothy then provided some statistics on notifications of suspected child abuse. She noted that Australia has the highest number of notifications in the world but cautioned that a given child may be the subject of multiple notifications. Dorothy informed members that about one-fifth of notifications are substantiated. She also reminded members that not all children that are being neglected or abused are the subject of notifications.

Members were then informed that the definition of child abuse has changed to include children who have been a witness to domestic violence.

One of Dorothy's slides provided some comparative data between Australia, England & Wales and Scotland in relation to child abuse and parental drug or alcohol addiction. In Australia two-thirds of children in care have a parent with an alcohol or drug dependence problem. However, Dorothy cautioned that not all drug/alcohol dependent parents abuse their children; just as all parents suffering from a mental illness do not abuse their children.

In terms of policy responses to the issues of child abuse and neglect Dorothy noted that it's important for governments to think and act holistically so that we have integrated responses that range from primary to tertiary services. We need to integrate responses across health, education, child welfare and income support, for example. Dorothy illustrated this with a skin cancer analogy:

- At the primary level we have taken steps to redress the hole in the Ozone layer;
- We have initiated public education campaigns e.g. "slip, slop, slap" & "stay under a tree between eleven and three";
- Doctors/GPs have got better at identifying skin cancers early; and
- At the tertiary level of intervention surgeons are often able to remove dangerous skin cancers

Dorothy did note that the key difficulty for governments in taking such an approach is that they are so used to thinking and operating within silos. This means that even if there is a general willingness between departments (or people within departments) to cooperate there are still issues to overcome with things like budget allocations – which have traditionally been based on a competitive bidding process.

A range of promising Australian and international early intervention approaches to child abuse and neglect were then discussed. In introducing a family home visiting service being piloted in SA, Dorothy noted that most Australian States have adopted a universal maternal health service. With about 98% of its children being weighed and measured through this service, Victoria has the highest take-up rate. Dorothy would like to see these universal maternal health services scaled up to include a parenting support program – which is where the pilot program in South Australia is targeted.

Dorothy identified **SDN Children's Services** - [www.sdn.org.au](http://www.sdn.org.au) – as a great example of 'family-centred practice' in early childhood education and care. SDN has developed the capacity to reach out to vulnerable children and families who wouldn't normally attend an early learning / childcare centre. They offer scholarships for children and they train their teachers and staff to focus not only on the children but also on their parents.

A quick description was also provided to members of each of three Indigenous early years initiatives. The first of these being the **Homemaker programs** in Anangu Pitjantjatjara Lands, in SA. In these lands, one third of children are being harmed through malnutrition. Dorothy described them as suffering from 'failure to thrive'. She noted that in her time at the Potter Foundation, it funded an evacuation of such children and their mothers to Alice Springs to the hospital and to child health centres. While in Alice Springs the children

gained weight but when they returned home with their mothers they rapidly lost weight again for a range of reasons such as the lack of education and boredom of the mothers (many of whom were just teenagers).

Dorothy suggested that failure to thrive was a really key issue for our Indigenous communities. Much of the work that is currently being done to develop and support leaders within the community could be undone in a generation if we don't address 'failure to thrive' as it is having significant negative impacts on the brain development of Indigenous young people in certain regions.

The Australian Centre for Child Protection at the University of South Australia is working with local people to address this issue through the Homemaker programs. The programs are working well but the challenge to the programs is 'can they be replicated elsewhere?'

The second Indigenous program that Dorothy discussed was the **Parents and Learning (PaL)** early literacy program piloted in the Napranum region on the west coast of Cape York between 2000 and 2002. This development and initial implementation of this program was funded by the Rio Tinto Aboriginal Foundation and it has received funding from The Ian Potter Foundation and the Westpac Foundation (and possibly others).

PaL is a 2-year home based program, which actively engages parents with their children in educational activities outside the constraints of "the school". It focuses on elements of early literacy and numeracy, on parents teaching other parents and parents as teachers of their own children.

The PaL program has 2 levels. Children start Level 1 in their preschool year and move onto Level 2 in their first year of formal schooling. The program involves a parent (or extended family member) working together with his/her 4-6 yr old child on a particular set of educational activities and reading a story book each week. Trained tutors who are also parents of children participating in the PaL program teach parents how to use the kits. Tutors deliver kits to the home and pick them up each week.

In discussing the **Mums and Babies** program in Townsville Dorothy noted that the program, which the Potter Foundation had funded, had been very successful. However, its bid for sustainability beyond the life of the Potter funding hit a real snag when the State Government balked at picking up the funding for the program. Dorothy noted that this was a key learning for her. The Foundation and the program had not engaged government during the planning and implementation stages but had just expected government to pick up the funding for the program when the Foundation was finished. The good news was that the State and Federal governments did end up picking up the funding for the program because its results had been just so undeniably strong.

In terms of lessons for grantmakers (especially, but not exclusively, in relation to early intervention programs) Dorothy offered a range of suggestions including the following:

- Very careful attention needs to be paid to innovation. A grantmaker's first thought when considering funding an 'innovative' program should be to ensure that they, and the program, do no harm.
- Rigorous evaluation of key projects is vital, particularly if you think they may have the potential for scaling up. This may actually require a grantmakers to spend more money on the evaluation of a project than on the pilot project itself.
- The potential to scale-up or transplant a project should be considered very carefully. (Dorothy used "transplant" rather than "replicate" because she feels that local factors often make it difficult to truly replicate a project, but the key elements of a project may be

transplantable into a different setting). Not all projects will be suitable. For example, a project may prove to be very effective but also just too costly to transplant or scale-up. Similarly, the success of the project may be too dependent on a particular person or group of people.

## **Questions and discussion**

Following Dorothy's presentation there was much discussion. Some of which is captured below:

### ***Dissemination***

- Dorothy was asked about the role and importance of dissemination.
  - The first point that Dorothy made was that not everything is worth disseminating. However, she went on to say that sharing knowledge of key successes (and failures) was important. She cited the *Early Learnings Research Reports* published by the Telstra Foundation as good examples of dissemination. The Telstra Foundation funded independent external evaluations of its grantmaking in various areas (childhood obesity, Indigenous community development and early childhood development) and published the results. These reports can be downloaded free of charge from the Telstra Foundation website at - [www.telstrafoundation.com/dir148/tfweb.nsf/webdocs/Newsroom~publications?openDocument](http://www.telstrafoundation.com/dir148/tfweb.nsf/webdocs/Newsroom~publications?openDocument)

### ***What role can small foundations play?***

- When asked what difference small funders could make, Dorothy explained that she believed that small foundations were often well-placed to form long-term trusting relationships with local service providers. This can enable them to become a very effective funder in a local region, and in fact can enable them to provide expert advice to larger funders.
- Similarly, small foundations with good networks can collaborate with larger funders to fund for particular parts of a larger project. One member noted that the Mary MacKillop Foundation had provided \$5,000 to provide a shade cloth for a project mentioned earlier by Dorothy. This small amount of money enabled Indigenous women to cook outdoors at the community centre which was a much more normal experience for them.

### ***What role is there for philanthropy in promoting collaboration between service providers?***

- One member noted that her organisation had received a surprisingly large number of applications for child abuse and neglect projects. She wondered if her organisation (and other trusts) had a role to play in promoting collaboration between some of these applicants - and if collaboration was a good thing.
  - Dorothy suggested that collaboration when done well was indeed a good thing. Dorothy was not in favour of 'letting 1,000 flowers bloom' for fear of disappointing communities who may have their hopes raised by a particular project and then dashed again when the project doesn't receive ongoing funding. If a funder is looking to create systemic change then the funder needs to assess, from the outset, the capacity of a project to be scaled-up.
  - Dorothy also suggested that to assess the capacity of an applicant organisation to undertake a collaborative project a grantmaker should ask for evidence of previous collaborations by the applicant. Particular attention should be paid to whether or not

the applicant has a track record of effective collaborations as opposed to a 'new convenient arrangement'.

### ***Funding innovation vs backing winners***

- It was suggested that the role of philanthropy is often stated as being 'to fund innovation'. Dorothy was asked to comment on this in light of the discussion that followed the previous question.
  - Dorothy's simple advice was that funders should not be afraid to back good, proven projects and organisations. If something works and it is fulfilling the mission of the funder, why wouldn't the funder continue to support it?

### ***The role of hope***

- A member who had heard Dorothy speak on 'visionary philanthropy' at the Philanthropy Australia conference in October 2005 asked her about the role of hope in philanthropy.
  - Dorothy explained that she had recently read a comment about Indigenous communities that went something like "support whatever is working and raising hope". She believes philanthropic funders should look to nurture and maintain hope rather than raise it and dash it again (see comment above about 'backing winners'). Thus, where possible, philanthropy should look to build the capacity of leaders in organisations that are working in difficult situations.

### **Close**

Time constraints meant that the session had to be wrapped up. Grant Hooper joined with members in thanking Dorothy for her thoughtful presentation. He also thanked members for their attendance and participation.

Grant also thanked [Perpetual](#) for hosting the meeting.

### **About Prof. Dorothy Scott OAM, Director of the Australian Centre for Child Protection at the University of South Australia - [www.unisa.edu.au/childprotection](http://www.unisa.edu.au/childprotection)**

Professor Dorothy Scott OAM is the Foundation Chair in Child Protection and the Director of the Australian Centre for Child Protection at the University of South Australia. Before taking up this appointment in 2005 she was the Head of the School of Social Work at the University of Melbourne, and prior to that, the Executive Director of The Ian Potter Foundation, a Melbourne-based private philanthropic trust.

Prof. Scott has a practice background in the areas of foster care and adoption, sexual assault, maternal mental health and child welfare.

Her development of innovative programs in these fields has been recognised in the award of the Medal of the Order of Australia and the Centenary Medal. Her research spans both the prevention and response to child abuse, and she has published four books and over forty international refereed papers. An advisor to State and Commonwealth Governments, Prof. Scott has conducted several high level inquiries in the field of child protection, and is recognised for her leadership in cross-sectoral child protection policy and practice.