The logo features the acronym 'AWCH' in a large, blue, hand-drawn font. Below it, the word 'celebrating' is written in a smaller, blue, cursive font. A large, red, glossy ribbon forms the number '40' in a stylized, three-dimensional font. The ribbon starts from the left edge, loops around the '4' and '0', and then extends upwards and to the right, ending in a large, curved shape that resembles a ribbon bow or a decorative flourish. The background is a light blue gradient with a bokeh effect of white and light blue circles.

AWCH
celebrating

40
years 1973-2013

A Tribute to AWCH

Reminiscences

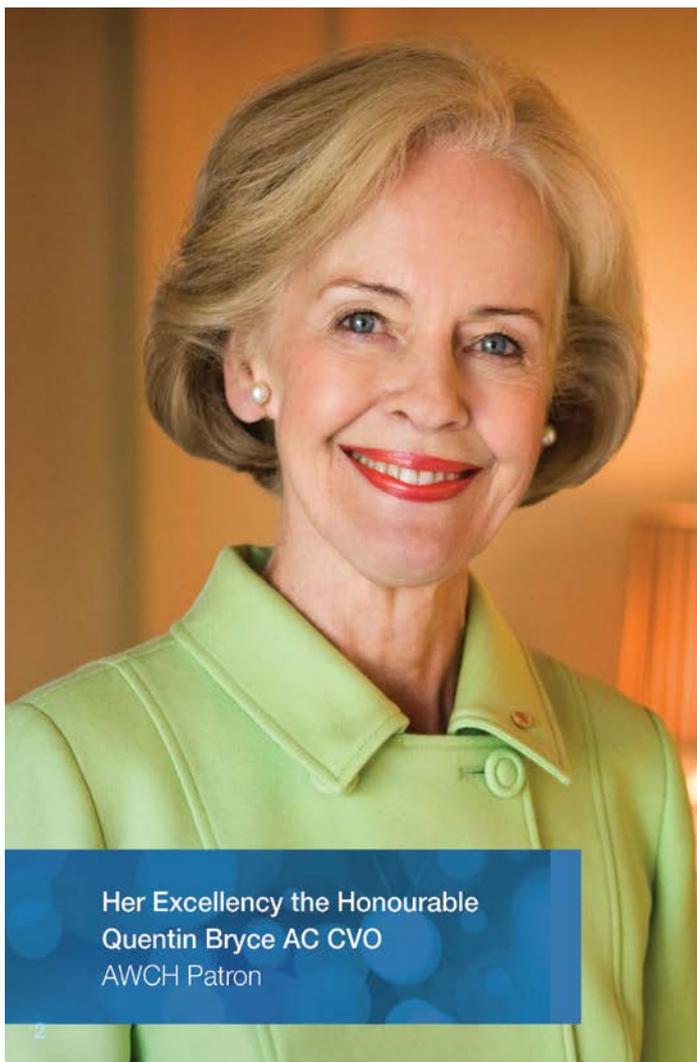


association for the wellbeing
of children in healthcare

www.awch.org.au

Quentin Bryce

Governor General of the Commonwealth of Australia
First National President, AWCH Patron



Her Excellency Ms Quentin Bryce AC
Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia

Message from Her Excellency the Honourable
Quentin Bryce AC CVO
Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia

for AWCH's 40th anniversary celebration

As the Association for the Wellbeing of Children in Healthcare marks 40 years of service to our community, I send warmest congratulations and affectionate greetings.

I have watched your organisation grow from a grassroots group of volunteers drawn together by a powerful commitment to the needs of sick children. As first national president in 1978, I was inspired by the professionalism and determination of the then Association for the Welfare of Children in Hospital to make a positive difference for children and their families.

Today AWCH is respected as a leading national voice in this area. Your work and perseverance – from creating benchmarks for children's health policy and standards of care to implementing the Ward Grandparent Scheme – will continue to benefit children, their parents and carers into the future.

As proud Patron of AWCH, I express my appreciation for your advocacy, your experience, your generous spirit and your dedication to the wellbeing of our young ones.


10.9.13.
GOVERNMENT HOUSE CANBERRA ACT 2600 AUSTRALIA
TELEPHONE +61(2) 6283 3525 FACSIMILE +61(2) 6283 3595

Dr Dennis Merrington

Founding AWCH Member, First President

“The most powerful force in the world is an idea whose time has come “.

AWCH was born in February 1973. There were a dozen people at this inaugural meeting, all of whom saw a need and all determined to bring about a change. The issue...quite simply to awaken the conviction that the emotional needs of young children were of at least equal importance to their physical needs, especially as this was to find expression through institutions.

Six months later AWCH wrote and submitted a controversial document to the Medical Journal of Australia which, to the surprise of many, was soon after published as its Editorial. This was titled “Young Children in Hospital”. I suspect at the time that this had a far greater impact on the outlook of health care workers in hospitals than was publically apparent. As one newspaper reported it “ruffled a few feathers”.

In August 1975 another Editorial was submitted and published called, provocatively, The Young Child in Hospital: A Health Hazard? This was an appropriate introduction for the Special Supplement called a “Health Care Policy Relating to Children and their Families” published, importantly, as a separate document in the same edition. This was a breakthrough!

From then on the Australian Medical Association and hospitals which admitted children could not be oblivious to these issues. It should be noted that the Medical Journal of Australia was and is read widely both here and overseas. So it logically followed that there were many responses to this publication—two from overseas included--One from James Robertson from the Tavistock Institute in London who called this Health Care Policy a “blueprint for public and professional education”. The second, from the Editor of the International Journal of Early Childhood who wrote saying I congratulate AWCH on a “magnificent humane document which deserves to become the hospitalised child’s charter”.

Finally, it is gratifying to see the ongoing efforts by so many people to continue to recognise and fulfil the special emotional needs of young children.

Doris Hart

Founding AWCH Member, First AWCH Development Officer



AWCH and its "SUGGESTED HEALTH CARE POLICY RELATING TO CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES"

Background

We have to remember that public hospitals started as charitable institutions primarily concerned to contain spread of disease. Hospitals were run by hospital boards which made the rules. Usually members were appointed until 70 or death - whichever came first. Because hospital boards were not answerable to the communities they served, the rules they made and the power that went with them became entrenched.

In 1973, given the available knowledge, the rules still governing the admission of children to almost every hospital in the land were archaic. A group of both parents and professionals came together to form AWCH and challenge this system.

As our first task we chose to survey the visiting hours on children's wards in hospitals in the Sydney area. Most ignored the request. The policies of the rest revealed widespread ignorance and callous disregard for the emotional needs of children.

Sylvia* and myself met with the NSW Minister of Health to seek government attitudes to what was happening. He was concerned but told us the power to make the rules belonged to the hospital.

We approached the College of Paediatricians. Dennis (Merrington) and I had an appointment with a senior official who told us that the College had no policy on the issue and no plans to formulate one. He suggested, surely tongue in cheek, that we should write our own. We decided to do just that. We formed a sub-committee of four, produced a draft copy and took it to a general meeting where it was finalised. The only money we had was from the \$2 subs of our members. Dennis paid for the printing and we sold copies at the meetings and forums we organised.

Meanwhile in Canberra momentous things were happening. Gough Whitlam had become prime minister. High on his agenda was a national health scheme. He called for submissions outlining the kind of health scheme Australians wanted. We sent in our submission outlining what we wanted for children together with how we could help him achieve it if he gave us a grant.

By January 1974 we had a grant and an office in Parramatta - our work could begin in earnest. On August 9, 1975 our policy was published as a supplement of "The Medical Journal Of Australia" and on September 1st the NSW Minister of Health declared it the official policy of the Health Commission of NSW. We had achieved an accepted blue print for the rest of the country.

The acceptance of the policy was a great achievement. Turning policy into practice was no less challenging but that is another story.

The short, exhilarating, controversial Whitlam era ended dramatically on November 11th, 1975 after barely three years. In that brief time Whitlam had achieved his great goal of a national health scheme for Australia.

I like to think that backing AWCH was one of his best investments. Because of it we shared, with him, the building of a health scheme which has become a model for the world - truly heady and rewarding times.

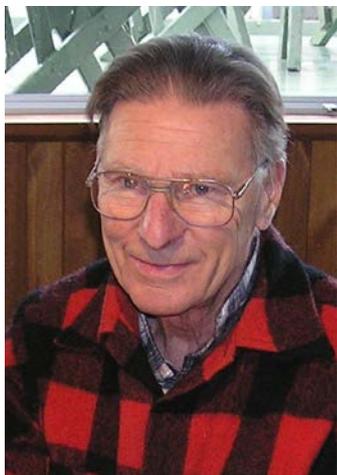
*Sylvia Rapley - founder member.

Authors of the policy

- Dennis Merrington
- Jenny Kaan
- Doris Hart
- Donald Scott-Orr

Dr Donald Scott-Orr

Previous Chairman and President of the NSW Association for Mental Health



It is so long, too long, since I have been in touch with AWCH. The generous invitation to attend the 40th anniversary warms the cockles of my heart. It takes me back to the derivations of AWCH and the later cobbling together of a policy document 'The Emotional Needs of Infants and Young Children, Implications for Policy and Practice' which to our delight was adopted as policy by the NSW and other state governments.

At the outset I was long involved with the NSW Association for Mental Health, including as Chairman and then President. It may be of interest that at the 60th anniversary of that organisation (around 1990) I delivered an address in which I referred to AWCH beginnings:

.....PATHFINDING

A quote from Mrs Marjorie Bull (trained social worker, with imagination, courage and great facility with language): 'One is not being asked to finish all work, but one is asked at least to try to begin it.'

It was Issy Pilowsky, when President, who popularised 'pathfinding' to characterise our Association's role. The Association's name may be (sometimes deliberately) lost in the name of a new endeavour - hence the source of the initiative may be forgotten or not acknowledged.

.....The ... continuing support with leadership from often highly intelligent, empathic lay people provides a less 'threatening' opportunity for interventions in the interests of mental health than those of many professionals. In addition, it is likely to continue to have a significant impact on professional development and practice, much as the emergence of so many mutual support groups (beginning with Alcoholics Anonymous in U.S.A.) has done during the same lifetime as our Association.

(We)..... had focussed on children, and our Young Children's Committee in the mid 60's researched the needs of children under 6.

In Governing Council I pummelled away at the Children's Committee about James Robertson's film 'A Two Year Old Goes to Hospital', and about needless emotional disasters which were common in our children's wards (among other places).

There was a need to address the whole range of issues, which Bowlby also addressed so eloquently - especially the separation associated with children going to hospital; so fresh in my mind from presentations of their work in a course I attended at the Tavistock Clinic while working in London.

It was Marjorie Bull, as leader of the Children's Committee, who took up the challenge, and this resulted in a public seminar convened by us, in the Australian Medical Association hall in Macquarie St, the outcome being A.W.C.H. (Association for the Welfare of Children in Hospital).

.....She writes: 'Before the seminar I put a letter into the Sydney Morning Herald addressed to Children Who Have been in Hospital - "Hey kids, what was it like? What did you think of it?" And we got scores of wonderful replies. And I did a more sober letter for their parents asking for their opinions too: so we got wide public participation as the association they formed at the seminar took the required work onto great results to the good'.

.....I have taken great satisfaction from my collaboration in some of these matters which relate so importantly to community development. It has helped alleviate the great frustrations associated with observing such slow progress in implementation of many necessary changes in mental health service provision.

Doris Hart, who had brought ambitions for similar reforms from UK experience, got with the flow and became the great powerhouse of AWCH. Dennis Merrington provided a figurehead and much good humour. They were heady times and there was contention and challenge but also much goodwill. We survived and so did the process.

Long live AWCH, until it becomes redundant! Go well and my best wishes to all.

Joy Chester

Founding AWCH Member



I would tell you that my AWCH activities were constant and that the reason I became so involved – I had watched a miserable ward of sick children (including my son aged 6) and over their beds the TV sets showed the man walking on the moon. That was the moment I knew things had to be improved. We shouldn't achieve such cruelty to our children when we were capable of putting a man on the moon.

We were trying to get folk to form support for our mothers. Some folk were very helpful at that time. I specially remember the Jewish Women (don't know the full name of the group) were very good. Our leader Doris Hart had been very active and kept a constant 'in touch attitude' to our

helpers and I am sure some folk like Sylvia Rapley were active. As you know Eva Langley built up an excellent reference library and saw it was available to our members. The real success of Eva's library and its borrowing availability was certainly a positive help to those who were working for the best possible effects of those caring for sick kiddies.

I would think that others would have experiences that you would be interested in. The library is I thought still operating and I would expect they would have some interesting stories to tell you.

Anne I am so grateful you are able to keep AWCH on as an active organization. It was inspiring to have our own Governor General heading AWCH now.

Dr Peter Cook

Child and Family Psychiatrist

Yes, it was I who proposed that an organisation be formed in Australia, along the lines of the National Association for the Welfare of Children in Hospital, in the UK. That had been formed following an investigation and Report in the UK. (See below from Googling on Platt and Children in Hospital. Sir Harry Platt was a distinguished UK surgeon.)

The push arose from John Bowlby's pioneering Report for the WHO "*Maternal Care and Mental Health*" of 1951. The second paper I ever wrote was about the application of this to the maternity hospital situation. "A two-year-old's mother goes to the maternity hospital", in 1962 in the NZ Med J. This was widely quoted and it led to changes in maternity hospitals visiting rules in NZ, UK, and Australia.

We planned and organised a meeting in the Australian Medical Association rooms in Macquarie St, at which speakers addressed various aspects of children in institutions. I spoke about the plight of young children in hospitals.

At the end of the first big meeting in the Australian Medical Association Hall in Macquarie Street, I moved that we form an organisation, to continue on working on the issues raised at that meeting, and some people willing to form a committee slowly put their hands up. At the first meeting of that committee each person was invited to tell the story of why they were there. I was quietly crying as I heard some of the experiences these people (mostly women) had been through. One woman was a holocaust survivor. She was Eva Langley, and she became the AWCH librarian for many years.

She wrote a small book "The Australian Association for the Welfare of Children in Hospital the First Ten Years". There should be one or more copies in the AWCH library. The details of this story are remarkable and not known to most people who have been or are in contact with AWCH.

AWCH soon became a respectable organisation, and it was invited by the NSW Minister for Mental Health to produce Guidelines for the Care of Children in Hospital. This was done, largely written by Dr Dennis Merrington. It was published as a Special Supplement of *The Medical Journal of Australia* August 9, 1975. "A Recommended Health Care Policy Relating to Children and their Families" was prepared by The Association for the Welfare of Children in Hospital. It was declared the official policy of the Health Commission of NSW on 1st September 1975 by the Hon R.O. Healey, State Minister for Health. Soon, other States followed this example.

I am now 86 and my memory is not what it was. I am wondering if you have this early history in the ACWH archives. It would be a pity if this were lost, as it is an interesting story of how reform can happen. There are more intriguing details including a memorandum (which I wrote with Dr Barry Nurcombe) and it was published as from the NSW Child

Psychiatrists about the welfare of children in hospital. It became the first Position Statement of the Royal College of Psychiatrists.

The above may be a bit out of order. How Joy Chester came to write her letter to the Minister of Health, is another intriguing story. I simply asked her to let me have a description of what she had seen so that I could tell the Superintendent of our concerns for the emotional health of the young children concerned. No one had previously observed and described what happened to young children over 24 hours for 3 days and nights.

Professor Graham Martin

Previous South Australia AWCH Member, OAM, MD, MBBS, FRANZCP, DPM
Professor, Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, The University of Queensland



I have very fond memories of my time with AWCH and the people with whom I worked in Adelaide and across the country and indeed internationally (I was at one time on the board of 'Pediatric Projects' in the USA) from about 1975.

I enjoyed the shared 'parents and professionals as partners' approach we instigated at the Adelaide Children's Hospital, and all the meetings we had over the 7 years of my involvement. I enjoyed the collaborative Randomised Controlled Trial research on child admission we completed at RCH (sadly never published).

I enjoyed starting, and editing, 'Interface' and gradually developing it toward a national newsletter for AWCH, and also editing the proceedings of the inaugural conference in Sydney in 1977 with James and Joyce Robertson as keynotes. I remember with some awe our meetings with Professor Julian Katz (I was still a psychiatric registrar in training), and several national committee meetings we had which included Quentin Bryce (now our Governor General) with whom I have met on several occasions since arriving in Queensland in 2001 (she presented me with my OAM in 2006).

In many ways it would be delightful to meet, and review the 40 years. I am intrigued that hospitalisation for children has deteriorated in the last 10 years, and there are groups now active to reverse this trend.

I certainly wish you all, and the organisation, well.

Beth Williams

Founding AWCH Member

I was a trainee nurse in 1963 in a paediatric orthopaedic ward. Many patients were long stay and most confined to their beds. Those were the days of neat tidy wards, doctors and nurses who knew best and parents who weren't consulted. The sister in charge of this ward followed hospital policy and was strict about visiting parents and as soon as the clock struck five out they would go, siblings were not allowed in the ward and never more than two visitors.

Small children from Pacific Islands, who had never seen a cot, were enveloped in white sheets, treated by doctors in white coats and fed by nurses in stiff starched dresses. These little ones responded by not communicating and not eating which only made their medical condition worse. A cuddle, coloured sheets or a sleep on a rug on the floor would make a lot of difference but kids had to fit the hospital mould not theirs.

Despite this I returned to Royal Alexander Children's Hospital in 1970 to work in a small medical ward. Every day I was confronted with unaccompanied babies from the country, children of migrants with little or no English, long stay patients and teenagers who had spent their lives in and out of hospital. I didn't set out to make a difference I did what I thought was right it was more like compassion and little bit of knowledge of child development. As well as the medical treatment I knew that children needed love, stimulation, familiar things and above all they needed their mum and dad.

It was always a challenge as there were the inevitable hospital rules but with the support of Prof Tom Stapleton, Dr Peter Cook, Dr John Yu and a newly arrived play therapist from Canada, Sarah Preston, we began to bend the rules. We held team meetings with doctors, therapists and parents so that we were treating all the needs of our young patients. We worked together to limit the distress and above all allowed parents to stay as long as their child needed them - they were an integral part of the treatment team.

There were no specialised play rooms but we moved the cots and lay blankets on the floor. There was a basket of toys and when we needed to do errands we took a baby in a pram. Matron and visitors learnt to step around and over toys and children. I did rounds with a baby on my hip and made time every afternoon to read a book to the children, usually with a baby on my lap and others on the floor. They were small changes but it was a change in the right direction and there was no increase in the infection rate.

Dr Peter Cook invited me to that first meeting of a group of parents and professionals who became AWCH. I was a member of the committee for 5 or 6 years. I served as secretary and spoke to mothers' groups about the psychological effect of hospitalisation on young children educating them on the new policies and encouraging them to ask to be a part of the team if their child were in hospital. I escorted small pre-school groups on familiarisation tours of the hospital wards and helped with fundraising to purchase that first Ronald McDonald House in Glebe.

My son, Curtis, was born with a cleft lip and palate in 1978 and his needs took precedence. After all I was now the mother of a patient. Thankfully our work through AWCH had now changed the policy in our children's hospitals and when I did return as a mother I took his own toys, teddies and clothes, I was allowed to stay for the duration of each of Curtis's hospital admissions just popping home each evening when Dad came from work. My allegiance switched from AWCH to Cleft PaLS and I became a volunteer support worker for other families until we moved to Brisbane in 1983.

Since then I have done the usual parental things, Mothers Clubs, Parents & Citizens Association, and lobbied to extend my son's school from K-10 to K-12 avoiding the need for him to travel a longer distance for his senior years. These days I am the treasurer and volunteer at our community hub. I have never set out to make a difference but when I see need I usually respond.

I am proud of my life achievements especially those at AWCH. We were pioneers in our day and I am pleased to see that our groundwork is now the norm in all of our hospitals.

Pauline O'Brien

AWCH Member since 1973

The history of AWCH is one of incredible achievement by determined and courageous parents and professionals to bring about change in harmful hospital practices whereby children were separated from their parents or carers. Membership of the Association enabled parents to support one another, to have access to an extensive library of resources which reinforced the parents' "gut instinct" that what they wanted for their children was "normal" and they were not being over-protective! The regular newsletters were filled with encouraging stories and articles, and there was a feeling of optimism for the future. AWCH has brought about the transformation of paediatric wards with play therapists, Ward Grannies and a myriad of practices to make hospitalisation and painful procedures less traumatic for children and families.

Personally, we have had great encouragement during the hospitalisation of two of our children, especially in 1976 when conditions were quite restrictive. On another occasion after moving from Sydney to the country we needed to find a doctor to treat our three-year-old son. I rang the local AWCH representative who was very helpful and via other contacts she gave me, we found a doctor, accustomed to treating children, who became our family doctor.

My feeling is that, over 40 years, AWCH has gone from strength to strength and it is due to the tireless work of dedicated parents, professionals and the wonderful staff who work to promote the emotional and psychological wellbeing of children and families.

Marion Steele

AWCH Librarian 1979-2001

I joined AWCH in January 1979 working as a cataloguer and indexer in AWCH Library. At the time I was completely unaware of the journey on which I was about to embark and the influence that AWCH and related experiences/adventures would have on my life. I was the mother of a little baby and although a medical librarian by training and experience I had no concept of the purpose of the organisation or my role within the organisation.

I started work one day a week in the small research library before the days of the Internet. Library catalogues were on cards placed on box drawers (remember?), no multiple indexes though Index Medicus did exist in large tomes in large libraries who could afford the cost and space to house it.

At that time existing medical libraries collected resources on the medical conditions of children and not on the psychosocial aspects of those conditions and the effect and role of families. So the material that AWCH was going to collect had to be manually found. A bit like finding a needle in a haystack! The library worked together with the National Association for the Welfare of Children in Hospital (UK) and Association for the Care of Children's Health in America in trying to locate what had been published and also publish new material.

Very quickly I became engrossed in the "workings" of AWCH and found a purpose and motivation not evident in my life previously. I believed in the work I was doing. What a gift!

The library was very small, focused and extremely well organised due to the vision and dedication of the founding librarian Eva Langley. There were books, journals, conference papers, pamphlets and 16 mm films. No such things as videos, DVDs, CDs or iView! This was the 1970s and I feel AWCH Library was ahead of its time trying to provide resources for an Australian wide organisation before the age of virtual reality.

Twenty two years of working for AWCH and becoming the AWCH Librarian and never a bored moment! At the Annual Conferences, areas of work were outlined and the library would set to work on researching what had been done in Australia and overseas on those topics for example play in hospital; parents being present at the time of anaesthetic induction.

Work in the library was dynamic, relationships between staff were intense and achievements were many. The Library team was quite a team, all very different with many skills and a belief in what we were doing.

Amazing that a small organisation placed so much importance on research and in the 1970s. The Library has had many metamorphosis since these times however continues to offer a unique niche service.

Irene Hancock

National President 1988 - 2003



I joined AWCH in 1980 after an invitation by two play ladies at Hornsby Hospital. I was teaching paediatrics in the general school (prior to nurse education transferring to the Universities) at the time. I became very involved with the NSW Branch and by 1988 was National President of AWCH.

During my time as National President our funding which had been secured from the Federal Government in 1975 was phased out over a three year period. The three years was for us to be able to become self-funded. We established FUND AWCH. Unfortunately this proved unsuccessful. People will contribute to fund raising for something tangible like a bus or sending a child on a trip, but are far less likely to give money for a philosophy.

Following representation to the NSW Premier, I was able to secure funding for the organisation, so the NSW Government through their Department of Health has funded the AWCH Office from 1988 to present day, the only National organisation funded by a State Government.

During my time as National President we expanded the Granny Scheme to a number of local hospitals; and we, despite vehement opposition from a number of anaesthetists, launched the video on parental presence during induction of anaesthetic. It is pleasing to know many of our opponents have changed and now champion the presence of parents.

One of the big changes was also the change of the organisation's name (which still kept the acronym AWCH) from the Association for the Welfare of Children in Hospital to the Association for the Welfare of Child Health.

Dr Sue Packer

Previous AWCH ACT President, AWCH Ambassador

In April 2005 I attended the AWCH conference at Parramatta. The AWCH Conferences always seem to end up being something really 'out of the bag' and that was again the case on this occasion. The theme this year was 'Healthy Solutions for Children'. It encompassed making the right choices for children's health, legal and ethical issues for child health, and health issues relating to parenting, schools and lifestyle choices. The most memorable aspect of the Conference was the dynamic and relevant contribution from young people, who discussed their own health and wellbeing experiences and as well as research they had done into the particular difficulties experienced by young people accessing appropriate health care.

Dr Graham Bench

AWCH member and AWCH Ambassador

Where do I start! Having been involved with the non-medical care of children in hospital even before AWCH was created, having been a registrar at Royal Alexandra Hospital for Children when Joy Chester had her original problem about being rejected from her child's company by the ward sister, my memories of AWCH are naturally extensive. As you may know, I joined AWCH in 1975.

Apart from that very initial involvement of Joy, my greatest thoughts about the work of AWCH are how much the wards in children's hospitals have changed, how the whole attitude towards children in hospital has improved and thus lessened the psychological trauma that they suffer by being hospitalised and in particular our very wonderful establishment of the AWCH Ward Granny Scheme.

I look forward very keenly to our 40th Anniversary Celebration and hope that some of the long-term members are able to be present.

Bea Sochan

AWCH Member

I can recall my first AWCH meeting as a student. It was held at Broughton Hall at Rozelle Hospital. Doris Hart was there talking about her experiences. Dr Julian Katz was also present. I also attended other meetings in the early years at the Steiner School at Vacluse which Susan Harris had organised. I recall past presidents such as Dennis Merrington and Graham Bench. It was over 30 years ago now.

But they were the days when AWCH worked so hard to establish protocols for children in hospital (such as allowing parents to stay overnight with their children in hospital in their rooms; explaining to children in detail what was going to happen when they went to hospital for an operation; pre hospital visits) many of which are taken for granted now.

AWCH has been an important organisation which has quietly achieved some wonderful changes.

Dr John Yu AC

Paediatrician, Past Patron of AWCH, Australian of the Year 1996

The last 40 years have seen great changes in the healthcare for children. Much of this has been in the advances in medical science and knowledge especially in the clinical application of these advances and the environment where the care was provided. But we should not ignore the better understanding that we have of the psychosocial needs of children and families particularly in times of illness and other stresses.

AWCH was an Australian pioneer in this arena and we should be proud of its achievements and acknowledge those early members and those other organisations who stridently and sometimes bravely advocated for the needs of children and families.

Today it is hard to believe how rigid our early hospitals were in areas like visiting hours, toys and play and the emotional needs of children and their families; let alone acknowledge the staff who cared for them and their personal commitment.

AWCH can feel very proud of the Ward Grandparent Scheme which transformed the lives of so many vulnerable children. It is good that this scheme was based on the AWCH volunteers and their dedication and love. The Scheme can still be usefully expanded to others hospitals beyond the current 13 hospitals in NSW.

One new challenge will be how to ensure the needs of children and young people are met with the current financial pressures on hospitals that have seen managers abandoning the concept of 'children's wards' in so many of our smaller hospitals. That may be reality but we must ensure that flexibility, understanding and a concern for children continues as managers face demands on resources.

The work of AWCH started in hospitals where the greatest need was seen but I hope that we can now widen this involvement and concern to the greater needs of children and families who face chronic illness and disadvantage in the community.

As we contemplate the future, let us proudly acknowledge the history of AWCH and its many achievements.

Christine Groves

AWCH Member, Previous Sydney Children's Hospital Head of Play Specialty

As one of the first play leaders (as we were called in 1977) at the then Prince of Wales Children's Hospital and subsequently as a toy librarian and Child Studies teacher at TAFE, I have had a long association with AWCH.

Throughout the 70s and 80s AWCH and its wonderful resources were so useful to us as joint advocates for the power of play in hospital. Everyone at AWCH but especially Doris, Eva and Marion gave such help and encouragement to this new role in children's care.

We frequently used the videos (and actual reels of film!), orientation information, research on the preparation for painful procedures etc for professional development and to introduce new programs within the hospital. Via AWCH, we were also able to help isolated/in crisis carers and their children to gain more knowledge about the illness and their rights, and to link them up with other families.

AWCH assisted in first bringing together play staff and volunteers from hospitals around the state to network, discuss problems and exchange ideas. I strongly believe that over the past 40 years AWCH has played a big part in raising awareness of children's health issues and sincerely hope it will continue to do so. Congratulations and thank you to everyone involved in helping AWCH reach this major milestone.

Colleen Foy

Nursing Unit Manager & Ward Grandparent Scheme Coordinator, Shoalhaven Hospital

I would like to say I have seen firsthand the value of the grandparent program, and the difference it makes to kids and their families. We have a number of families who have been in Emergency Departments at sites further down the coast (>100km away), who really appreciate the grandparents involvement, offering kind words and a very welcome chance of a break. Also, there have been times when a child's mum is in the Emergency Department and the grandparent has been able to divert the child's attention away from what is happening to mum- that has been invaluable. The volunteers are truly making a difference.

Diana Carmody

AWCH member, Social Worker at The Children's Hospital at Westmead

Congratulations to AWCH from all paediatric social workers on your significant anniversary. Your lobbying on all fronts on behalf of children and their families has brought huge changes in the way both hospitals and all health providers function.

As a start, the family is considered a crucial part of any patient's treatment and AWCH was responsible for bringing in 24 hour family support for children in hospital, for encouraging hospitals to provide accommodation for family members either by the bed or in hostel accommodation, and in allowing a parent go in with a child while an anaesthetic is administered prior to surgery. When social workers at the children's hospital have had concerns about family rights AWCH is the organisation we ask for help.

The Paediatric Support link service is a potential resource for parents of children with an unusual diagnosis and the library, hospital play kits, pamphlets and brochures are readily accessible for hospital staff as well as for families and carers.

The AWCH Ward Grandparent Scheme is one in which the Children's Hospital at Westmead and I have been very involved with from the days when AWCH first approached the head social worker at Camperdown to set up a pilot!

From its beginning with two wonderful ladies who gave their time as volunteers to be with children whose parents could not be with them the Scheme has blossomed and spread to hospitals all over NSW and also interstate.

Our ward grandparent scheme currently has 14 active ward grandparents and we are hoping to recruit at least 4 more as there is always a waiting list. We are very proud of the difference a ward grandparent can make to a child's hospital experience developmentally as well as emotionally and parents are always telling us how supported they feel when they can confidently leave their child for a few hours to attend to other important issues.

Natasha Hund

AWCH Member, Hospital Play Specialist & Life Spirals Counsellor

Thank you AWCH for supporting my studies to become a hospital play specialist, and your continuing support in my work. Your librarians are great and I was thrilled to find out Marion who helped me while I was studying had moved and now works at my current workplace!