



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
VICTORIA

CHILDREN'S PROTECTION SOCIETY 120TH ANNIVERSARY

Tuesday 15th March, 2016

Associate Professor Jane Munro AM, President of the Children's Protection Society, and Board Members

Ms Aileen Ashford, Chief Executive Officer, Children's Protection Society

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

First, I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we are gathering and pay my respects to their elders past and present and to any elders here with us this afternoon.

It is a pleasure to welcome you to Government House to celebrate the 120th anniversary of the Children's Protection Society.

This celebration is particularly meaningful to me as it combines three things that I hold dear.

The first is that, as you know, the history of the Society is intimately connected with the history of this House and the role of the Governors' wives.

Secondly, in the course of a forty year career in the law, I saw first-hand the absolute necessity for the protection of children, amongst the most vulnerable members of our society.

And finally, because it is an integral part of the Governor's role to facilitate good people and good organisations who are working towards the betterment of life in our State and our nation.

As I am sure you are all well aware, this Society was founded by Lady Sybil Brassey, the wife of Governor Brassey, who served Victoria from 1895 to 1900.

Lady Brassey was motivated by a sincere love of children. She had supported the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children in England, and had not been in Victoria long before recognising that a similar need existed here.

Lady Brassey consulted widely. She asked the Chief Commissioner of Police for advice, and then the heads of all of the children's charities in the colony, before deciding that there should be a protection society, based on the English model.

And so the Victorian Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to and Neglect of Children was established at a meeting in Government House on 21 March 1896, nearly 120 years ago to the day.

Five days later, the Age praised Lady Brassey's philanthropic work, (in language that probably wouldn't be used today), saying that "we may well feel grateful that a lady so highly placed is using her gracious influence on behalf of the lowliest of the race."

What is less known about Lady Brassey is that she had this House filled with five dogs of various breeds, and a tame cockatoo, who waddled around the house behind her, and loved to pose next to her when photos were taken!

Lady Brassey laid a solid foundation for the Society, and her legacy was carried through a subsequent 19 Victorian Governors' wives who supported the Society, in the role of Chief Patron.

Somewhat breaking tradition, and of course being the first female Governor, I have gladly accepted the role of Chief Patron, and I look forward to a fruitful and ongoing relationship with the Society.

It should come as no surprise that the work undertaken by the Society particularly resonates with me, given my years of experience in family law.

As a solicitor, then as a barrister, and later as a magistrate in the Children's Court, in the adult Magistrates' Court, as a coroner, and finally over many years as a Family Court judge, I unfortunately saw family violence, child abuse and neglect from every angle, and on an all too frequent a basis.

I saw the impact of fear on small children. I saw the threats and the risks to women and to children following a separation. I witnessed families experiencing multiple complex issues with family violence, mental illness, and a lack of parental capacity.

As a community, we are enriched by the Society's long-term commitment to children and families, with its suite of first-rate educational and care services.

Over the past 120 years, the Society has embraced legislative and policy changes, moved with the times, and tailored its programs to meet the contemporary needs. That accounts for its success and its longevity.

I am delighted to thank the wonderful staff and volunteers who, just by way of example, provided in the last financial year:

- more than 23,000 hours of service, and assisted more than 370 families, via their family services;
- more than 6,000 hours of counselling support for over 400 families via their therapeutic services;
- and, more than 190 hours of time every week, via their almost 100 volunteers.

With the hard working and dedicated staff and volunteers, I am certain the Society will continue to nurture, support and strengthen the lives of vulnerable children, young people and families.

I am delighted to celebrate the 120th anniversary of the Society – right here where it started – and I look forward to seeing it continue to flourish in its important work.

It now gives me great pleasure to invite Associate Professor Jane Munro, President of the Children's Protection Society Board, to address us.