



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
VICTORIA

OZCHILD 170TH ANNIVERSARY
Thursday 20 May 2021

Mrs Helen Maxwell-Wright, President, OzChild
Board Members
and **Dr Lisa Griffiths**, CEO
The Hon. Luke Donnellan MP, Minister for Child Protection
Dr Matthew Bach MP, Shadow Minister for Child Protection
Distinguished guests

First, I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land upon which we are gathering and pay my respects to their Elders past and present and to any Elders here with us.

Tony and I are delighted to welcome you to Government House this evening to celebrate the 170th anniversary of OzChild.

As your Patron, I am pleased because I know the importance of your work. And I am delighted because we don't get to celebrate that many 170th anniversaries!

Your founding year, 1851, was a big year in Victoria's history. It was, of course, the year Victoria formally separated from New South Wales and became its own colony. It was also when gold was discovered here.

In summary, the Gold Rush saw the colony's population treble, with great wealth for some, but poverty and family upheaval for many others, with a particularly adverse impact on children.

A group of women with links to the St James Church of England in Melbourne had already recognised the need to care for the poor of their parish. So, by 1851, finance for a new building to house this growing need was secured, and the St James Orphan Asylum and Visiting Society was born.

Its aim was to provide shelter, education, and healthcare for Victoria's vulnerable children.

A great privilege of this role is that we have now met and considered some of the special coterie of organisations that have celebrated anniversaries of around 150 to 170 years. There are not that many, but enough to observe some commonalities.

First, they change with the times. As with others in that elite group, OzChild has done just that.

It has overseen a shift in the program, services, and support offered to protect vulnerable youngsters. From residential care in orphanages in its early days, to home-based care in the mid-20th century, to foster and kinship care in more recent times.

Secondly, these successful organisations stay true to the core values that initially drove them.

Today, as across your history, you ensure that *all children and young people are safe, respected, nurtured, and reach their full potential.*

And today, just as across your history, we still have vulnerable children whose needs must be met, with some 45,000 Australian children currently placed in an out-of-home care arrangement.

This evening is an opportunity to thank everyone connected with OzChild for your focus on evidence based and early intervention programs.

It also provides an opportunity to congratulate you on rising to the challenge of continuing your work throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Thank you to OzChild President, Helen Maxwell-Wright and the Board, to CEO Dr Lisa Griffiths and the staff, and to donors, foster and kinship carers and volunteers.

In each instance, I should add 'past and present'. Although it is safe to assume that no-one here has served across the full 170 years, I know that many have been involved for a long time, and the baton has been passed between some of you in this room.

Finally, what a pleasure to also have amongst us some of those whom OzChild has supported. You bring a particular joy to the occasion.

We are proud that this evening represents a long connection between the Governor of Victoria and OzChild – one that dates back to the earliest days.

Lady Hotham, the wife of our first Governor, was a strong supporter. His Excellency Sir Charles Hotham laid the Foundation Stone of the Main Building in 1855 and Lady Manners-Sutton, wife of our 4th Governor, was Patroness. And many Governors and Governors' spouses have been involved since.

None though have had the privilege that I have this evening, which is to wish OzChild a very happy 170th anniversary.

We hope that you enjoy your time with us, and now it is my pleasure to introduce Minister Donnellan to address us.