

December 2004

Issue 6

Convenor's message

Dear A4 member,

Greetings for the summer season. For most of us, this is a time of very mixed emotions as Christmas comes in the middle of a period of major transition.

My observations of Christmas for children with ASD make me aware that they vary enormously in their response. When my son was young, Christmas meant nothing to him. He would easily give up on presents if the wrapping was too difficult. New toys didn't excite him much — he preferred old familiar toys. So people who did not know him well and had tried very hard to get him something special were visibly disappointed by his response. And as parents, we were disappointed that he was not experiencing the joy of these occasions.

Now he is older, he loves Christmas and all it brings. There was a period when we could not place presents under the tree without their being opened prematurely. We got over that. We still have to remind siblings to put delicate presents away to avoid getting damaged through rough treatment or disassembly.

These days, our Christmas is for all our kids. Maybe we target our non-ASD children and include kids with ASD giving them every opportunity to enjoy it. It seems easier now than it was in the beginning. We don't need to plan ahead and prepare for the event to the same extent as we once did; and I don't think we've just become used to it.

So I hope you have a great Christmas. If you are new to all this, and feel overwhelmed at present, look to a brighter future. I hope you pause to appreciate all the positives after it is over.

Thanks to Don Randall MP from WA whose actions have given A4 a meeting with Tony Abbot MP, the Health Minister, early in 2005. Also, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare released a bunch of new reports (see <http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/index.cfm/subject/7>) that provide new quotes and more opportunities to increase awareness of ASD. Maybe Christmas came slightly early for A4!

A task for A4 in 2005 is defending parents of children with ASD from attacks on their parenting skills. For example, ACT and Victorian state governments, rather than tackle ASD, started programs in 2004 targeting parenting practice — thus reviving an insulting, prejudiced and outdated view that ASD is due to suboptimal parenting. But parenting practices do not cause ASD. By the 1960s people saw many siblings of children with ASD are not disabled, and disabled siblings vary widely, despite sharing the same parents. The “poor attachment” or “refrigerator mother” theory of autism was discredited.

Parents of children with ASD already address their responsibilities and obligations thoroughly. Can parents do more? Perhaps getting information on ASD and parenting sooner will help people. But communities must recognise that parent training around ASD aims to improve parents whose skills are already spectacular. Is it practical or fair to ask that better parenting skills produce better outcomes in the absence of effective early intervention, expertise and appropriate programs for people with ASD?

Governments must do their bit to give people with ASD and their parents/carers a fair go. Parents are crucial but governments who make them responsible for meeting their child's clinical needs deny governments' part of this mutual obligation. Government cannot substitute parents for specialised professionals in supervising ASD-specific early intervention and education, in providing clinical treatment for their child's clinical disorder or to compensate for the absence of essential services.

I wish you all the best for the Christmas season.

Regards,
Bob Buckley - Convenor

FROM THE OFFICE OF THE PREMIER OF VICTORIA

DATE: Thursday, December 16, 2004

PUTTING VICTORIA'S CHILDREN FIRST: A NEW AGENDA

The Premier, Steve Bracks, today announced the creation of a new Minister for Children to drive the delivery of improved services and a better start in life for Victorian children.

Community Services Minister, Sherryl Garbutt, will become the new Minister for Children and will oversee a new Office for Children in the Department of Human Services (DHS).

A new Child Safety Commissioner will also be appointed to ensure the safety and protection of Victorian children at risk.

"Victoria's children are our greatest asset and our investment for the future," Mr Bracks said. "Overwhelmingly, evidence shows investment in the early years supports families in the important job of raising happy and healthy children.

"This Government recognises the importance of the early years and has boosted funding to Victoria's child and family support system since coming to office.

"The Minister for Children will build on this investment by providing a strong voice for children and delivering more coordinated and integrated services to give them the best possible start in life."

The Minister for Children and the new Office of Children were major recommendations in the Premier's Children's Advisory Committee (PCAC) Report, *Joining the Dots: A New Vision for Victoria's Children*.

The Premier also released an exposure draft of the *Working With Children* legislation and a discussion paper for public consultation until February 25.

"This legislation will widen the bans already in place on those working with children and extend the regime for checking those employed or volunteering in child-related fields," he said.

"Compulsory police checks are already carried out on teachers and child care workers. In future, the self-employed and volunteers who have contact with children through pre-schools, schools, religious organisations and overnight camps will also be checked."

The proposed checks will consider the following information:

- Registration on the recently established Sex Offender Register;
- Convictions for sexual assault, child-related violence or trafficking or supplying drugs to a child anywhere in Australia;
- Pending charges for sexual assault, child-related violence or drug offences and
- Serious disciplinary action by prescribed professional registration boards.

The Attorney General, Rob Hulls, said it was proposed an assessment notice allowing a person to work with children would be valid for five years.

A reassessment will be automatically triggered if a person is charged with a relevant crime.

"The checks will impact on many Victorians and we want to make sure they reflect community expectations," Mr Hulls said.

"That's why we urge everyone with an interest in the protection of our children to make submissions on the exposure draft Bill and discussion paper."

The new Child Safety Commissioner will be located in DHS and report to the Minister for Children.

Ms Garbutt said the Commissioner would implement a number of measures designed to better protect vulnerable children in the community.

Other key Government responses to the PCAC Report include:

- A permanent Victorian Children's Council to be established to provide expert policy advice to the Premier and Minister for Children;
- The new Office for Children within DHS to bring together the range of children's services provided outside school, ranging from maternal and child health, kindergartens to foster care and juvenile justice services;

- A new Interdepartmental Board to be established to bring together Secretaries of Departments to ensure better co-ordination of children's policies and services;
- New regulations for Outside School Hours Child Care and
- A new Statewide Plan for Victoria's Children to provide a blueprint for children's services from the pre-natal period to school entry right across the State.

"These new initiatives will assist the Government to effectively plan for the delivery of children's services, now and in the future, and ensure our young children are school-ready," Ms Garbutt said.

"The Statewide plan will identify gaps in the children's service system and guide future improvements to better meet the needs of children and families."

Key legislation for children is expected to be passed through the Parliament next year, including the *Working with Children Act* and the revised *Children and Young Persons Act*.

The Premier's Children's Advisory Committee Report, *Joining the Dots: A New Vision for Victoria's Children*, and the Government's response is available on website address www.dpc.vic.gov.au

The exposure draft Bill and discussion paper are available on the Department of Justice website at: www.justice.vic.gov.au

A4 Contacts

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Profile

NAME: Saint Nicholas (Alias: Santa Claus)

BORN: I prefer to remain mysterious about my age

LIVES: The North Pole

FAMILY: Mrs. Claus, Elves and Reindeer

LIKES LISTENING: to Christmas music

LIKES READING: letters from children

LIKES RELAXING: with my family on Christmas Day

LIKES EATING: all the yummy treats on Christmas Eve

LIKES: children who are nice and Mrs. Claus

DISLIKES: children who are naughty and pouting

IDEAL WEEKEND: being able to watch all the children's faces when they open the presents I leave on Christmas Eve

LAST HOLIDAY: Christmas Day till New Years Day last year

NEXT HOLIDAY: Christmas Day till New Years Day this year

Note: I have asked the editor to attach a copy of my visit application for your family. It is not necessary to complete and send the application in (delivery will continue as in previous years), but it does make my itinerary much easier for Mrs. Claus to arrange. HO, HO, HO and have a Merry Christmas.

Editors Note: This application is not to be taken seriously.



Santa's Visit Application



Please Note: You better not pout, you better not cry, you better be good, I'm telling you why. Santa Claus is coming to town, and he hasn't got much time. To assist in the efficient processing of all children's requests please fill in this form clearly and truthfully because, he **does** know.

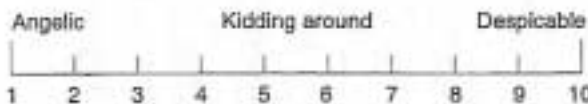
Applicant details

What did your parents name you?

Where do you live?

Have you been good?

On the scale below please indicate (tick) your level of behaviour over the past 12 months (Remember he knows)



If you ticked between 1 and 4 inclusive:

What would you like for Christmas? (Please print)

If you ticked between 4 and 7 inclusive:

What would you like for Christmas? (Please print)

If you ticked between 7 and 10 inclusive:

What would you like for Christmas? (Please print clearly)

Access details

What is the pitch of your roof? degrees

If the pitch is more than 30 degrees please attach a roofing diagram indicating at least two (2) anchor points. (eg. TV antenna, spire, chimney etc.)

Does your roof have a minimum load bearing capacity of 1 ton per square meter? (8 reindeer, a full sleigh, plus a big bloke in a funny suit)

No On the night please ensure that your driveway is clear of all objects bigger than a cat.

Unsure Please attach a certified engineer's report clearly outlining the average load bearing capacity of your roof.

Yes

Do you have a chimney?

Yes When was it last swept? / /

Approx. diameter of stack opening centimeters
Please ensure on the night that the hearth is clear of burning embers and sharp objects.

No On the night please leave the back door or a large window ajar.

Gift placement details

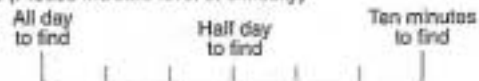
Where would you like your gifts placed?

Stocking (Please specify stocking size)

End of bed

Under the Christmas tree

Hidden (Please indicate level of difficulty)



Refreshment details

Will refreshments be provided? Yes

What type of refreshments will be available?

(Tick more than one)

Brandy Rum Gin Scotch Whisky

Vodka Bourbon Beer Wine

Other (Please specify, including percentage proof)

	Alc./Vol.
	Alc./Vol.
	Alc./Vol.

Where will these refreshments be found?

Liquor cabinet (Please leave unlocked, or a key in an obvious place)

Bar

Fridge

Cupboard (Attach a house plan indicating which cupboard/s in which room/s)

On the kitchen table (Preferred option)

Declaration

I the abovementioned child living at the abovementioned address, declare that the information provided herein is true and correct in every detail. Furthermore, I authorise Santa to contact my parents of the same address to confirm the details set out herein. I understand that in the event that my story does not correspond with that of my parents, especially the bit about my level of behaviour, it could be a lean Christmas. I also promise to be asleep when Santa arrives, because, he **does** know.

Your name in running writing

Whats today?

 / /

Please send this completed application by Air Mail, arriving no later than, the night before Christmas, to:

Mr. S. Claus
C/- Mail Service HOHOHO
North Pole

Form SCLAUS1 ES
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