Supporting Children • **Connecting** Families • Across the **World**



ANNUAL REPORT

2025-26

International Social Service AUSTRALIA

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Child Safety Statement

ISS Australia is deeply committed to the safety and wellbeing of children. This commitment is underpinned by policies and procedures aimed at fostering an organisational culture of child safeguarding and providing assurance that child harm and abuse are recognised, responded to and reported in line with our legal and moral obligations. All ISS Australia staff, volunteers, students and interns are required to have a working with children check and undertake child safe training. For further information on our detailed child safety policy contact ISS Australia.

Acknowledgement of Country

ISS Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which our NSW Office stands, the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation and pay our respects to Elders, past and present. We also wish to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which our Victoria Office stands; the Boon Wurrung and Woiwurrung (Wurundjeri) peoples of the Kulin Nation and pay our respects to Elders, past and present. We offer this respect to the Traditional Owners of the land throughout Australia. ISS Australia acknowledges the importance that connection to land and culture has to identity and the wellbeing of children, families and communities.

Who we are

ISS Australia is a leading agency in Australia providing social work, legal and family mediation services. We are a national not-for-profit service provider and registered as a charity with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC).

What we do

ISS Australia provides intercountry social work, legal and mediation services supporting children and families separated by international borders. We do this with over 140 International Social Service network members around the world.

Our Vision

For children and adults to be connected to family, culture and community, wherever they are in the world.

Our services and international focus

- International parental child abduction legal and social work service
- International child welfare and kinship care
- International post adoption tracing and reunification
- International family mediation and child consultation
- NSW Special Search Service
- International family tracing and reunification



















We believe that **everyone needs to belong** and **know who they are.**



Dr Fiona McIntosh

President's Foreword



It is my pleasure to present the ISS Australia Annual Report for 2025-26, a year in which the organisation has continued to strengthen its services, partnerships and strategic direction while remaining firmly focused on the rights, safety and wellbeing of children and families.

A major focus for the Board this year has been looking ahead. Our strategic planning process and production of a new strategic plan for ISS Australia has provided an important opportunity to consider ISS Australia's distinctive contribution, the changing environment in which we operate, and where our specialist capabilities can have greatest impact in the years ahead. Consultation confirmed the strong regard in which ISS Australia is held for its professionalism, specialist expertise, child-rights focus and access to an extraordinary international network. It also highlighted opportunities to build on these strengths in areas such as family finding, kinship care, cultural identity, reunification, mediation and policy leadership.

The year has not been without challenges. Like many not-for-profit organisations, ISS Australia is operating in an environment of rising costs and continuing uncertainty around the adequacy of funding levels. The Board has remained particularly attentive to financial sustainability while ensuring that the organisation maintains the specialist expertise and service quality on which children, families and our partners depend. Despite these pressures, ISS Australia has maintained a sound financial position and continued to carefully manage its resources.

We have also continued to strengthen governance and organisational capability. Cyber security, information management and responsible use of new technologies have been important areas of Board attention, reflecting the highly sensitive information entrusted to ISS Australia. Our continuing work on cyber risk and digital capability will help ensure the organisation is equipped for the future.

It was a privilege to represent ISS Australia at the ISS International Council in Sofia in October, underscoring the vital importance of our global network in advancing cross-border child protection and family welfare.

This year we also welcomed Lyndall Goodwin and Sarah Collett to the Board, who bring valuable child protection, family welfare, social work and legal experience to our governance. Their appointments add to the breadth of expertise of a Board deeply committed to the purpose and future of ISS Australia.

On behalf of the Board, I extend my sincere thanks to Megan Mitchell and the entire ISS Australia team. Our staff work every day with families experiencing separation, uncertainty and often considerable distress. Their professionalism, persistence and humanity are at the heart of ISS Australia's impact.

I also thank our government funders, philanthropic supporters, corporate partners, professional colleagues and members of the international ISS network. These partnerships enable an organisation of modest size to achieve an influence and reach far beyond what otherwise would be possible. I extend too my thanks to my fellow Board Directors for their support and expert contributions.

As we look to the future, ISS Australia does so with a clear sense of purpose: to build on what we do best, remain responsive to emerging needs, and continue helping children and families maintain the connections, identity and belonging that matter throughout their lives.

Dr Fiona McIntosh
President, ISS Australia Board

Megan Mitchell AM

CEO's Report



The 2025-26 year has been one of consolidation, reflection and forward momentum for ISS Australia. As I complete my second year with the organisation, I have an even greater appreciation of the complexity of our work and the extraordinary expertise required to support children and families whose lives span jurisdictions, cultures and international borders.

Throughout the year our core social work, legal, mediation, family finding, child protection, and family welfare services continued to respond to difficult and often highly sensitive matters. Demand remained strong, with staff also managing emerging issues including forced marriage, exit trafficking, family violence and increasingly complex requests for information arising in the context of court processes. Throughout, client feedback has continued to demonstrate high levels of satisfaction with both our services and our staff.

One of the most significant pieces of work undertaken this year has been the refresh of our Strategic Plan. Extensive engagement with staff, Board members and external stakeholders reinforced the distinctiveness of ISS Australia: our cross-border expertise, integrated professional services, international network and unwavering focus on children's rights, identity and family connections. It has also encouraged us to think confidently, but carefully, about how this expertise can be applied in adjacent areas such as family finding, kinship care, and cultural planning and support.

Our external profile and partnerships have continued to grow. We have engaged with senior government and community stakeholders; maintained active involvement in the international ISS network; and contributed to discussions on intercountry adoption, cross-border placements, domestic and family violence, care reform and children's rights.

Our team has actively projected our expertise onto the global stage this year with senior staff representing ISS Australia at major international forums. This has included Managing Lawyer, Jess Raffal and Deputy CEO Damon Martin, presenting at the World Congress on Family Law and Children's Rights in Cambridge. Damon also addressed the ASEAN Regional Workshop on Cross-Border Child Protection in Bali, and Jess represented Australia at a specialist global expert forum on the 1980 Hague Convention held in London. Kay Hardefeldt, the Managing Social Worker in the IPCA team, also attended and presented at the ISS Case Coordinators' meeting in Portugal. We have also amplified our domestic and regional impact by delivering targeted training sessions on children's cultural rights and cross-border opportunities.

In May this year I convened the first meeting of an ISS-wide working group on Artificial Intelligence, reflecting our commitment to ensuring emerging technologies are used responsibly, ethically and in ways that enhance rather than replace professional judgement. Notably, too, Deputy CEO Damon Martin was awarded a prestigious Churchill Fellowship, completing an international study tour across the USA, the Philippines, and New Zealand to produce the benchmark report, *Beyond Borders: Reimagining International Kinship Care for Children in Care in Australia*. Building on our expertise, we officially launched our online International Parental Child Abduction (IPCA) fundamentals training package in February 2026, significantly extending our educational outreach.

Investment in our people has remained a priority. Our Sydney staff conference brought colleagues from different teams and locations together for professional development, reflection and collaboration.

Financial sustainability remains an important challenge. While ISS Australia has maintained a stable position through careful financial management, rising wages and operating costs, and the conclusion of some philanthropic grants require continued vigilance and greater diversification of our income. We have therefore continued to pursue philanthropic, corporate, pro bono and fee-for-service opportunities alongside our core government funding.

I am particularly grateful to our major government funders, the Attorney-General's Department and the NSW Department of Communities and Justice, and to the foundations, law firms, donors and other supporters who contribute to our work.

Most importantly, I thank our staff. ISS Australia is a relatively small organisation undertaking remarkably complex work. The professionalism, knowledge, compassion and persistence of our team - and their willingness to keep learning and adapting - are what enable us to make a difference for children and families every day.

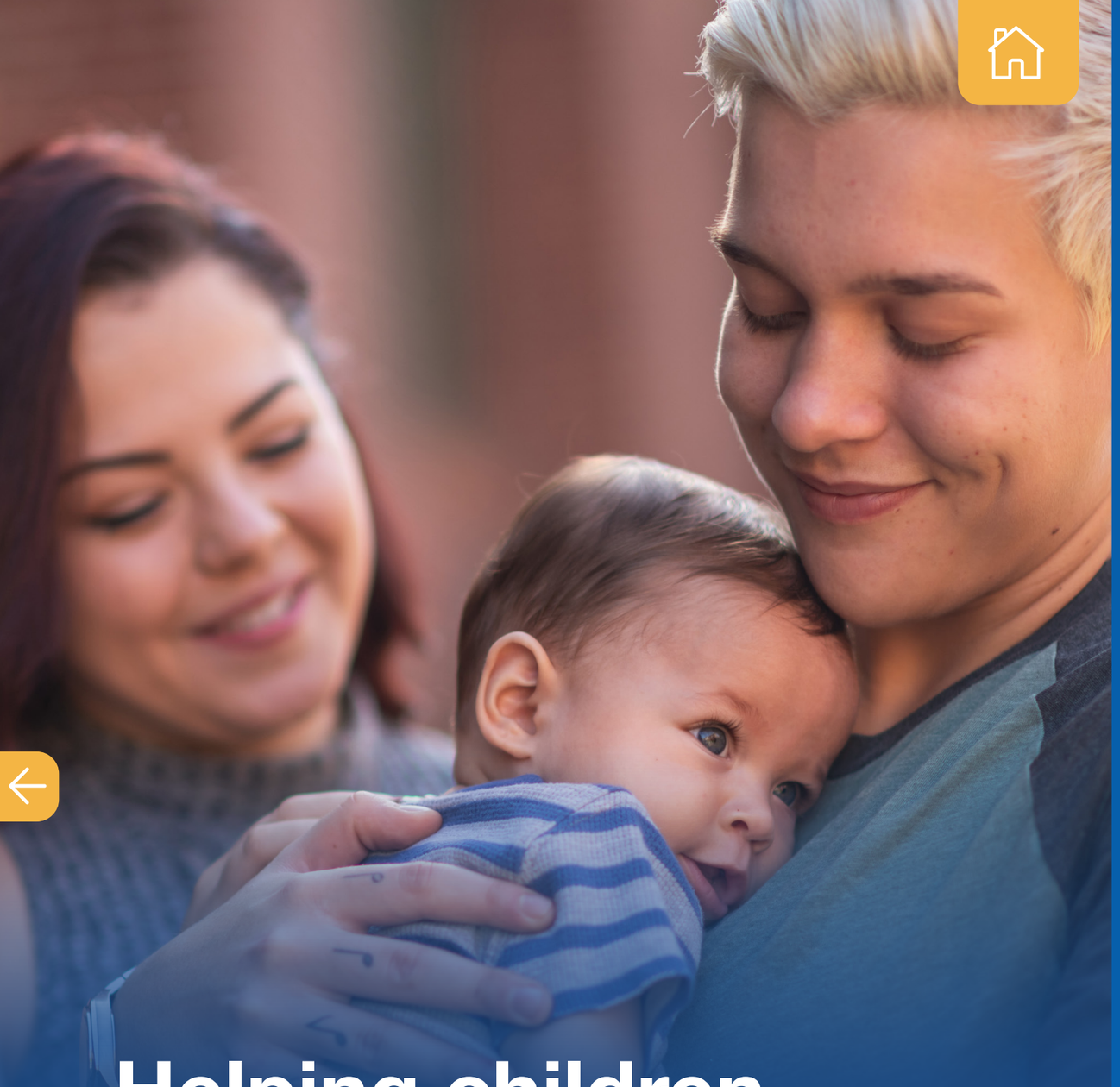
I also thank Dr Fiona McIntosh and the ISS Australia Board for their guidance, support and commitment throughout the year. As we enter the next phase of the organisation's development, I am excited about the opportunity to build on our specialist strengths while remaining grounded in a simple but powerful idea: children and families need connection, identity and belonging, wherever they are in the world.

Megan Mitchell AM
Chief Executive Officer, ISS Australia

ISS Australia – Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP)

In the second year of our Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan, our focus has been on continuing to turn our commitments into everyday practice. This means deepening cultural sensitivity, awareness and knowledge across ISS Australia, while building genuine and sustained relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations. Our RAP reminds us that reconciliation is not simply a set of actions to complete, but an ongoing process of listening, learning and strengthening our cultural capability so that our services and workplace are respectful, culturally safe and responsive.





Helping children, young people and **adults be safely connected** to family anywhere in the world.

Our Impact

2025–26 ISS Australia Service Data

Donate now to support our work

In 2025-26 ISS Australia worked extensively on 491 cases

International Child Welfare and Kinship Care 73

117 **International Parental Child Abduction Legal Service**

International Parental Child Abduction Social Work 147

NSW Special Search Service 34

52 **International Post Adoption Tracing Service**

52 **International Family Mediation Service**

16 **General Family Tracing and Reunification**

In 2025–26, we also responded to nearly **1,000 enquiries**, providing advice and information without ongoing case management.

International Parental Child Abduction Service



The International Parental Child Abduction (IPCA) Legal and Social Work Services provide nationally coordinated legal and social support to families affected by IPCA, helping them navigate complex cross-border legal processes while addressing the emotional and practical impacts on children and families. These situations involve multiple jurisdictions, urgent safety concerns, and high levels of conflict, requiring a specialised, multidisciplinary response.

ISS Australia is uniquely placed to deliver this service as part of the global International Social Service (ISS) network, with over 140 partners worldwide, enabling effective international collaboration and case coordination. The service strengthens the family law system's capacity, improves coordination and decision-making, and supports Australia to meet its obligations under the 1980 Hague Convention, ultimately protecting children and supporting families through complex international disputes.

We acknowledge the ongoing funding from the Attorney-General's Department in supporting this important work.

Client Services

In the 2025/26 financial year, the IPCA Social Work Service supported **147 cases** and **189 enquiries** involving more than **61 countries**. The countries most highly represented in cases and enquiries were New Zealand (12%) and India (9%), followed by the United States of America (5%). China, Pakistan and the United Kingdom shared equal fourth place (3%).

In the 2025/26 financial year, the IPCA Legal Service finalised **75 matters** and responded to **376 enquiries** involving more than **80 countries**. The countries most highly represented in matters and enquiries were New Zealand (13%), the United States of America (8%) and India (7%), followed by the United Kingdom (5%). Ireland, Brazil, China and Japan were next, at around 3% each.

Combined, this amounts to **719 matters covering 94 different countries**.

Highlights

As part of our ongoing commitment to improving service delivery and ensuring client safety, we introduced a quick-exit button, visible on every page of our website. It is modelled on best practice approaches to support individuals accessing our services where family violence risks are present.

In 2025, the IPCA Social Work Service reached a significant 20-year milestone, marking two decades of continuous service delivery and a commitment to positive outcomes for clients and communities.

Our Senior Family Violence Specialist, Bettina, had the honour of meeting The Duchess of Sussex at a community lunch hosted by McAuley Community Services for Women. Bettina shared insights into the critical work ISS Australia does, including the indicators of family violence in international parental child abduction, and how we place the rights, safety and wellbeing of children at the centre of our work. The Duchess expressed her appreciation for this important work and acknowledged the value of ISS services for families navigating incredibly complex situations and international borders. We are proud of Bettina for representing ISS Australia with such professionalism and passion.

Jessica Raffal presented at the *Second Forum on Domestic Violence and the 1980 Child Abduction Convention with a focus on the Operation of Article 13(1)(b)* in October 2025 in Fortaleza, Brazil. Jessica Raffal also co-authored a paper on the challenges faced by left behind parents in 1980 Hague Convention cases who are survivors of domestic violence.

Jesscia Raffal – Managing Lawyer and
Kay Hardefeldt – Manager, IPCA Service

NSW Government Funded Services



During 2025/26 financial year, ISS Australia proudly delivered three NSW Government–funded services: the **Intercountry Casework Project**, the **International Post Adoption Tracing Service (IPATS)**, and the **NSW Special Search Service**. Together, these programs demonstrate our expertise in connecting children and families across borders and cultures.

Intercountry Casework Service

The Intercountry Casework Project supports the NSW Government's Department of Communities and Justice and non-government organisations in complex child welfare matters with overseas components. In 2025/26, we managed **73 cases**, underscoring the ongoing need for specialist expertise to support complex cross-border casework matters.

Strengthening Knowledge of the 1996 Hague Child Protection Convention

The **1996 Hague Child Protection Convention** provides an important framework for cooperation between countries in cases involving children with family, care or protection matters that cross international borders. Although ISS Australia considers it a vital child protection instrument, its reach remains more limited than other Hague Conventions due to the smaller number of participating countries.

To strengthen our knowledge and practice, members of ISS Australia's Intercountry Casework Team participated in specialised in-house training. We were privileged to hear from **Sandrine Alexandre-Hughes**, former staff member of the Hague Conference on Private International Law and now a Sydney-based barrister, who provided valuable insights into the purpose and operation of the Hague Conventions.

The team also benefited from a practical session delivered by **Kerri Phillips**, former Legal Aid solicitor and now a private practitioner, covering key concepts such as habitual residence, cross-border jurisdiction and recognition of orders. This professional development has further enhanced ISS Australia's capacity to support children and families involved in complex international child protection matters.

International Post Adoption Tracing Service (IPATS) & NSW Special Search Service

Funded by the NSW Government since 2007, the **International Post Adoption Tracing Service (IPATS)** supports NSW residents affected by adoption where a birth relative is living overseas. During 2025/26, ISS Australia assisted more than **50 individuals** to search for family members abroad, with almost half of these searches involving the United Kingdom.

Recognising the complexity of post-adoption tracing, our team participated in quarterly **Masterclass Peer Supervision Sessions** facilitated by adoption specialist **Penny Haskins**. These sessions provided opportunities to reflect on complex cases, strengthen practice knowledge, support staff wellbeing, and enhance the quality of services delivered to individuals and families navigating international post-adoption searches and reunions.

NSW Special Search Service

The **NSW Special Search Service** has now completed its eighth year of operation and remains ISS Australia's only purely domestic service. Funded by the NSW Government, the service provided free specialist search and reunion assistance to **34 people** in 2025/06 who have been separated from family members as a result of NSW Government intervention, including adoption, out-of-home care, foster care, and placement in children's homes.

A key resource supporting this work is our access to **LifeSearch**, an online database of NSW Births, Deaths and Marriages records. This invaluable tool enables our team to locate family members and achieve life-changing reunions for individuals who have been separated from their loved ones, often for many decades. Through this service, ISS Australia continues to help people reconnect with their family, identity and personal history.

I extend my sincere thanks to my deeply committed team, who bring professional expertise and a genuine commitment to making a difference in the lives of children and families. ISS Australia also acknowledges the ongoing funding and support of the NSW Department of Communities and Justice, which enables us to deliver these vital services and strengthen connections for children, families and communities across borders.

Damon Martin, Deputy CEO and
Manager, NSW Government Funded Services

International Family Mediation Service

ISS Australia's International Family Mediation (IFM) service has remained an important source of support for families navigating complex family matters across international borders.

The service, which has supported **175 families** in the 2025/26 financial year, provides specialised mediation to help parents and caregivers work through arrangements concerning children. Parents and caregivers may choose to discuss a range of topics including where children live, maintaining relationships and communication with the parents and children, parenting time, proposed relocations, and situations involving international child abduction.

The mission of the IFM service is to reduce parental conflict and litigation using a child focused approach, because ongoing parental conflict affects children and their development. Mediation helps families avoid lengthy and adversarial family law processes, reducing emotional, financial, and psychological stress for both parents and children. The IFM service can also provide a safe and specialised mediation service to parents who are separated across international borders.

During the 2025/26 financial year, the IFM service supported **52 mediation cases** and responded to **123 enquiries**. Through a child-focused and impartial process, the service assisted families to navigate complex issues, strengthen communication, and work towards practical agreements that prioritise children's wellbeing.

During the 2025/26 financial year, the IFM service was supported by a generous grant from the **Gandel Foundation**, enabling ISS Australia to maintain the IFM service. The IFM team are continuing to meet their ongoing professional development obligations through regular training, peer and external supervision.

IFM Co-ordinator, Ms Eleni Bailey continued to play an active role on the Central Coast Family Law Pathway Network Steering Committee as Vice-Chair. During the year the group met to hold their annual planning day, delivered quality professional development to family law professional across the Central Coast, and held their annual dinner in May 2026.

Feedback from clients about the IFM service:

- ***"The mediator was outstanding - calm, impartial, and exceptionally clear throughout the process. She guided me through an extremely stressful time, and her support genuinely felt life-saving. Thank you to her and ISS."***
- ***"I felt that the mediator cared about the child's safety more than anything"***
- ***"Thank you very much for your help and support and for your amazing professionalism."***
- ***"Thank you for bringing me back into contact with my little girl, forever grateful."***

Eleni Bailey – Coordinator, International Family Mediation Service



Staff Spotlight 2026 **Isabelle Hayden**

I started as a Lawyer in ISS Australia's Legal Service in September 2025. I have spent the last year learning from our amazing team of lawyers.

Prior to joining ISS Australia, I began my career as a Legal Consultant with the United Nations. I worked within the Prosecutor's office at the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia, a hybrid tribunal based in Phnom Penh. The ECCC prosecuted senior leaders of the Khmer Rouge for War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity, including genocide.

I returned to Australia and joined Nicholes Family Lawyers. At Nicholes, I gained invaluable experience in both complex parenting and property matters before the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia. I particularly loved working with the team on our pro bono caseload, supporting clients through extremely difficult situations. Through Nicholes Family Lawyers, I was honoured to accompany the Hon. Alastair Nicholson to Phnom Penh to assist with Children's Rights International's three-day seminar with members of the Cambodian Government. It was at Nicholes that I first heard of ISS Australia and the incredible work they do.

In 2020, I returned to the Prosecutor's office of the ECCC remotely, to assist the team in drafting and coordinating the response to over 250 points of appeal.

I then moved to New Zealand and joined the Crown Solicitor's office at Pollett Legal as a Prosecutor. This provided a new experience for me acting as both solicitor and barrister, appearing before the Court at all stages of litigation, including jury trial. My time at the Crown provided opportunity for me to advise Government on prosecutions including breaches of the Human Rights Act 1993 and New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990.

Following my time in New Zealand I relocated to the United Kingdom where I worked as a Senior Legal Counsel at the Coventry Building Society. I worked within both the Commercial team and the Governance team and was appointed Charity Secretary for the Coventry Building Society Charitable Foundation.

I am extremely excited to be back home in Melbourne, working with such an incredible team of lawyers at ISS Australia. I am grateful for the support they have provided me as I have settled into the role, and I look forward to continuing the important work of ISS Australia.



Our People

Board of Directors

Dr Fiona McIntosh – President
Nina Brooks – Vice President
Richard Giles – Treasurer
Peter Arnaudo
Deborah Fry
Susan Wnukowska-Mtonga
Nicole Baker
Mary Griffin (to December 2025)
Lyndall Goodwin (from February 2026)
Sarah Collett (from February 2026)

Our Patron and Ambassadors

PATRON

The Hon Alastair Nicholson AO RFD QC
Former Chief Justice of the Family Court of Australia / Chair, Children's Rights International

AMBASSADORS

Ra Chapman
Professor Felicity Gerry QC
Dr Sue Packer AM

Our Staff

Corporate

Megan Mitchell AM – CEO
Ann Freilich – Accountant
Nadeene Jones – Bookkeeper / Admin Assistant

NSW Government Funded Services

Damon Martin – Deputy CEO
Phoebe Peters – Senior Intercountry Social Worker
Anjali Prabhu – Senior Intercountry Social Worker
Janet Henegan – Senior Intercountry Social Worker
Casey Bush, Senior Intercountry Caseworker
Phoebe Lewis, Senior Intercountry Social Worker (from July 2025)

International Parental Child Abduction and International Family Mediation Team

Kay Hardefeldt – Manager
Eleni Bailey – Senior Social Worker / International Family Mediation Coordinator / Child Consultant
Amelia – Senior Social Worker / Child Consultant
Zanna – Family Violence Social Worker
Bettina Twyman – Senior Family Violence Specialist

International Parental Child Abduction Legal Service

Jessica Raffal – Managing Lawyer
Charissa Chong – Senior Lawyer
Emily Collins – Lawyer
Erika Orenstein – Lawyer
Isabel Hayden, Lawyer
Imogen Randazzo, Paralegal (to February 2026)
Diya Ammee, Paralegal (from April 2026)
Zia Wagener, Paralegal (from April 2026)

Casuals, Students and Volunteers

Breanna Worthington (Marketing and Design Volunteer)





Casework in Action

Every day, ISS Australia works with families across borders, helping to navigate complex situations involving adoption, child protection, abduction, and family separation. The following anonymised case studies highlight the diversity of our work and the shared goal of ensuring children's rights to safety, family, and identity are upheld.

Bringing a Child Home: Cross-Border Collaboration in Action

In early 2026, a father took his child from Australia to an overseas country during a holiday and refused to return him. The mother had experienced a history of coercive and controlling behaviour by her former partner. While the child remained overseas, the father liquidated family assets and depleted the mother's bank account, further compounding an already distressing situation.

ISS Australia's Legal Service lodged a return application under the 1980 Hague International Child Abduction Convention with the Australian Central Authority (ACA), while the mother pursued parallel legal proceedings overseas. Working closely with the ACA, the Legal Service supported cross-border coordination with the overseas Central Authority and provided relevant evidence, including information about the history of family violence.

In response to our application, the overseas court ordered the child's return to Australia. The child has since returned safely to his mother. This case highlights the importance of timely legal intervention and international cooperation in protecting children's rights and supporting families affected by international child abduction and family violence.

Rebuilding Connection

ISS Australia's International Family Mediation Service was contacted by Michael*, a father in Australia, seeking to re-establish contact with his 7-year-old daughter, Ava*, who lived with her mother in the USA. Ava and Michael had been separated for three years, and the family sought support to safely and meaningfully reintroduce contact.

Through joint mediation, both parents were supported to focus on Ava's needs and agree on a gradual pathway for rebuilding her relationship with her father. It was agreed that contact would initially begin with voice messages, allowing Ava and her father to reconnect at her own pace. After one week, contact would progress to short video calls three times a week, with Ava supported to end calls whenever she wished.

The case demonstrates how international family mediation can support parents to move from prolonged separation, towards a child-focused and manageable reintroduction of contact, creating a safe pathway for a child to rebuild a meaningful relationship with a parent.

Reconnecting Family, Identity and Culture

When Lulu* accessed her adoption records in her early 20's, she discovered information about her birth father and Māori heritage that had not been part of her life growing up. Although her father had expressed a desire to remain in contact when she was a child, those connections were never established.

With support from ISS Australia and ISS New Zealand, Lulu began searching for her paternal family. While she learned that her birth father had sadly passed away, she was successfully connected with her four half-siblings and has begun rebuilding important family relationships.

Lulu's story highlights the lifelong importance of preserving family, cultural and identity connections for children in care. It also demonstrates how family tracing can help individuals reconnect with their heritage and strengthen their sense of belonging, even many years later.

Working Across Borders to Secure Children's Futures

Throughout 2025–26, ISS Australia coordinated a complex international child protection matter involving Australian and overseas authorities, legal representatives and international partners to support safe, long-term care planning for two teenage brothers.

Working closely with the NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ), overseas child protection authorities, ISS network partners and legal representatives, ISS Australia facilitated regular international case conferences, coordinated monthly home visits overseas, facilitated an international guardianship assessment and supported the exchange of critical child protection information. The service also assisted with complex legal, immigration and guardianship enquiries to inform ongoing permanency planning.

This case highlights the importance of sustained international collaboration and specialist cross-border expertise in supporting children's safety, wellbeing and long-term care. By connecting authorities and professionals across jurisdictions, ISS Australia helped ensure that planning remained coordinated, informed and focused on the best interests of the children.

* Names have been changed to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the individuals involved.

Support ISS Australia

ISS Australia gratefully acknowledges the support and involvement of the following funders, donors and partners:

Government and related bodies

Commonwealth Attorney General's Department

NSW Department of Communities and Justice

Philanthropic Foundations and Trusts

The Myer Foundation

The Gandel Foundation

Corporate Sponsor

Rafton Family Lawyers

Nicholes Family Lawyers

Partners and Supporters

The Benevolent Society
Community Legal Centres NSW
Community Legal Centres Australia
Cynch Security
E-Nerds
Lumenia
Reconciliation Australia
Stories in Motion

Finally, we would like to acknowledge our wider ISS global network partners, including our General Secretariat in Switzerland, who contribute so much to our work and to improving the lives of children and families separated by borders.

Donate

ISS Australia relies on the generous donations of individuals to support our work with children and families separated by international borders.

Donations over $2 are tax deductible. Visit our website or call 1300 657 843 to make a donation.

Leave a bequest

Make your legacy on that help change the lives of children and families separated by borders. Call 03 9614 8755 to discuss your bequest options in complete confidence.

Get involved

Follow us on social media. Sign up to our quarterly newsletter. Volunteer for us. Apply to be an intern if you come from the social work, law, media and communications, marketing or international studies disciplines.

Connect with us

ISSAustralia

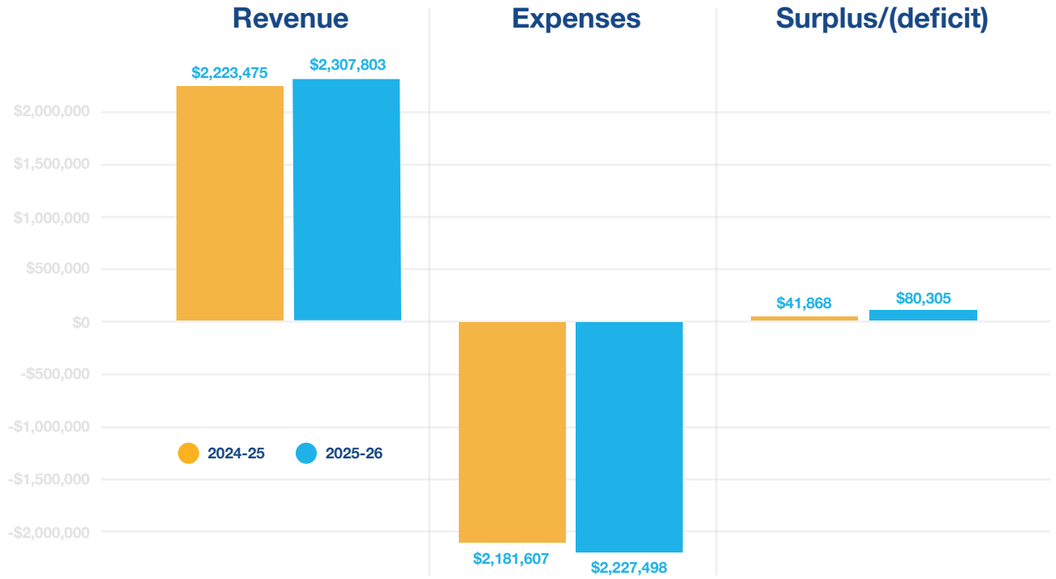
@iss-aus

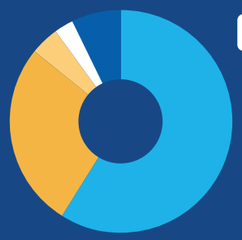
International Social Service Australia

Donate now to support our work

Financial Report

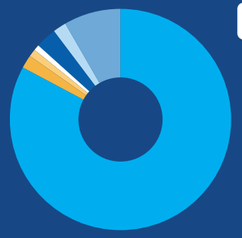
ISS Australia Financial Snapshot 2025-26 operating results





Revenue 2025-26 — $2,307,803

Federal Government grants **57%**	$1,302,100
State Government grants **28%**	$648,753
Philanthropy and Donations **4%**	$96,836
Fee for Services **3%**	$73,901
Investment income **8%**	$185,495
Other **0%**	$718



Expenses 2025-26 — $2,227,498

Employee Benefits **82%**	$1,833,185
Occupancy costs **2%**	$55,223
General Secretariat membership **1%**	$28,204
Depreciation **1%**	$15,437
Professional Development **4%**	$84,104
Communication costs **1%**	$12,755
Other **9%**	$198,590

Financial Position at 30 June 2026

ASSETS	
Current Assets	$636,086
Non-Current Assets	$2,496,332
Total Assets	**$3,132,418**
LIABILITIES	
Current Liabilities	$251,029
Non-Current Liabilities	$22,160
Total Liabilities	**$273,189**
NET ASSETS	**$2,859,229**
Accumulated Surplus/(Deficit)	$2,613,330
Reserves	$245,899
Total Equity	**$2,859,229**

An article from ISS Australia's Corporate Sponsor, **Nicholes Family Lawyers**

By Sally Nicholes, Managing Partner at Nicholes Family Lawyers

Protecting Children When Family Violence Crosses Borders

Nicholes Family Lawyers (NFL) is pleased to continue its longstanding partnership with International Social Service (ISS) Australia. This year we consider a question at the centre of international family law practice: how children can be protected when family violence is the reason they have been taken across a border.

A changing profile

The 1980 *Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction* was designed to secure the prompt return of children wrongfully removed to, or retained in, another Convention country. When it was drafted, the typical taking parent was a non-custodial father. That picture has changed. HCCH statistical data shows that mothers now account for 73 per cent of taking parents, up from 68 per cent since 2003. Many are primary carers returning to family support after a relationship has broken down. A significant number are leaving relationships marked by family violence. This is consistent with what we see in practice.

Grave risk and its limits

Article 13(b) allows the court to refuse return where there is a grave risk that return would expose the child to physical or psychological harm, or otherwise place the child in an intolerable situation. The exception has traditionally been applied with restraint. This reflects the principle that return proceedings decide where a child's best interests should be determined, not what those interests are. However, in *DP v Commonwealth Central Authority* (2001) 206 CLR 401), the High Court held that the exception should be applied according to its terms, without any additional narrowing of the construction.

Recent decisions show courts examining the circumstances of return closely. In Moroz & Moroz [2025] FedCFamC1A 41 , return to Turkey was refused because the children's non-biological mother and primary carer faced possible prosecution over the surrogacy arrangement and might not be recognised as their parent there. Where family violence is alleged, however, outcomes remain mixed. Courts have at times ordered return on the strength of undertakings from the left-behind parent. Such undertakings are not enforceable under the 1980 Convention and may offer limited protection to a parent who has experienced violence. By contrast, the New Zealand Court of Appeal in LRR v COL [2020] NZCA 209 declined to return a child to Australia, finding that established family violence would place the child in an intolerable situation.

Protection that can be enforced

The 1996 Hague Child Protection Convention offers a more reliable framework. Under Article 11, the courts of the country where a child is present may take urgent protective measures. Those measures are recognised in other Contracting States, including the country of return, until that country's own authorities act. The Convention also provides for recognition and enforcement of parenting orders, including those dealing with parental responsibility and with whom a child lives and spends time. In Australia, it is implemented through Part XIIIAA of the *Family Law Act 1975* and the *Family Law (Child Protection Convention) Regulations 2003*. Its usefulness depends on both countries being parties, which is not always the case.

A balanced perspective

NFL acts for parents seeking a child's return and for parents who have left a country to keep a child safe. Seeing both perspectives informs our contribution to legal commentary and to professional education delivered with ISS Australia and members of the judiciary. Research into the protection of taking parents who are fleeing violence continues internationally, and keeping pace with it remains essential.

Sound legal advice is important when a family is in crisis, but prevention matters too. ISS Australia's work in preventing abduction and supporting mediation, where appropriate, complements the role of the courts.

Our organisations play different parts in the system but share a commitment to children maintaining safe relationships with both parents across borders. We are proud to support that work.

Please note these views are those of the author.



An article from ISS Australia's Corporate Sponsor, **Rafton Family Lawyers**

By Maurice Edwards, Special Counsel – Rafton Family Lawyers & Leader – Rafton Arbitration & Mediation Practice

Another year of collaboration between Rafton Family Lawyers and International Social Service Australia has passed as we complete our fifth year of a partnership.

The team at Rafton Family Lawyers has continued to assist separating families by resolving family issues through dispute resolution. Whether it has been by way of collaboration with other lawyers, mediation, parenting coordination or arbitration our team of experienced dispute resolution practitioners at Rafton Arbitration and Mediation Practice (RAMP) or by way of litigation in Court with our family law specialists at Rafton Family Lawyers, we have continued to secure favourable outcomes for both our clients and parties generally in the family law space.

In this past 12 months our team members have represented clients and assisted parties involved in international relocation disputes (including Hague Child Abduction Convention Applications) in Australia, England, the United States and Israel.

During 2025/26 our RAMP leader, Maurice Edwards, in his capacity as a fellow of the International Academy of Family Lawyers (IAFL) has attended family law conferences in England, Kenya, Malaysia, China and Australia and has met with his international friends and colleagues so as to keep abreast of family law developments around the world.

Maurice has been this year researching the changes to the family law systems around the globe and the extent the laws and practice in different countries have achieved a fair outcome for separating families. He proposes to announce his findings at a meeting of members of the Australian Institute of Family Law Arbitrators and Mediators (AIFLAM) at the Barangaroo office of Rafton Family Lawyers on Thursday, 26 November 2026, when he presents "Magic Screen on the Wall Which is the Fairest of Them All?".

On other news the RAMP team continue to host the annual Reflections in Law Conference which has become one of Australia's leading family law conferences. This year the conference was held in Mudgee and featured presentations from 8 Judges of the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia, specialist family lawyers and leading psychologists.

The Reflections in Law Conference (No.6) is to be held in Kiama, on the NSW South Coast in March next year and will again involve presentations from 8 Judges of the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia, and world experts in the areas of overseas child support and the arbitration, mediation and resolution of family law disputes. The Kiama conference will also feature, as the keynote speaker, Heather Hostetter, the immediate past President of the IAFL.

We at Rafton Family Lawyers and RAMP share the ISS Australia mission, to support, protect and reunite children and families who have been separated by international borders and we continue to value our partnership with ISS Australia as we enter into our 6th year of collaboration.

Please note these views are those of the author.





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