

**VOLUNTEERISM AND GOVERNMENT POLICY IN
INFANT WELFARE IN QUEENSLAND, AUSTRALIA,
1931-1961: WORKING ROUND THE BAN**

VIRGINIA THORLEY

University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia

ABSTRACT

Whereas in other Australian states voluntary organizations set up and managed infant health clinics and state governments only later became involved, in order to resolve conflicts or raise standards, Queensland began with government control. From the start, these well-baby clinics were established and maintained by the state government, whose policy precluded any involvement by the voluntary sector in baby clinic management or other aspects of the work of the Maternal and Child Welfare section of the Department of Health and Home Affairs. One organization, the Mothercraft Association of Queensland, attempted to contribute to maternal-infant welfare in the years 1931-1961. This article will discuss how the association worked in a way that was complementary to the government's work, and non-confrontationist, to achieve some of its goals.

INTRODUCTION: BACKGROUND

The term "infant welfare movement" refers to those interests that worked to improve maternal and child health in the first half of the twentieth century. In Australia, the movement was comprised of individuals and voluntary organizations and, increasingly, state governments. Deacon (1985) points out that this movement was part of a broader "efficiency" movement, and that health professionals and administrators in the United States, Britain, and Australia used the infant welfare movement's claims of being scientific and rational to open up employment opportunities for themselves.

The efficiency movement grew out of the influence of the American time-and-motion expert, Frederick Winslow Taylor, who from the 1880s was preoccupied with improving efficiency in factories by finding *the one correct way* of performing a task. In time, Taylorism became so influential that it permeated not only the workplace but other aspects of life (Kanigel, 1997). “Taylorism in the home” attempted to regulate domestic tasks according to the rationalization and efficiencies of the industrial workplace in Weimar Germany (Nolan, 1990), and also in Australia and other English-speaking countries.

Apple (1995) defines “scientific” motherhood as “the insistence that women require expert scientific and medical advice to raise their children healthfully.” Mothercraft involved the teaching of approved ideas and techniques to mothers and young girls, in the belief that education about childcare provided by physicians and nurses was superior to maternal instinct or the advice provided within the family. Mothercraft classes and well-baby clinics also helped extend the sphere of influence of health workers in Australia (Deacon, 1985). Although the baby clinics were established to instruct the poor in hygiene and mothercraft, middle-class women became their keenest clients (Reiger, 1985). Through these and other influences, the belief in the mother as proficient in childcare was replaced with the idea that she was in need of direction from the new “experts.” The power of professionals and para-professionals grew with promotion of mothercraft, or “scientific mothering,” with its strict rules about hygiene and regularity (Deacon, 1985).

VOLUNTEERISM IN INFANT WELFARE

In other Australian states and in New Zealand the involvement of the voluntary sector in infant welfare had been welcomed by governments from the beginning of the infant welfare movement. Only later, during conflicts between voluntary bodies or because of concerns about standards, did state governments gradually involve themselves. In Queensland the situation was different as the government was determined to carry all responsibility from the beginnings of the infant health clinics in the years following World War I, discouraging community involvement from the start. This policy created a different ethos for maternal and infant welfare in this state.

Early moves to establish child health facilities in Queensland had been led by volunteers. The first Children’s Hospital in the state capital, Brisbane, was opened in 1878, largely due to the work of a Mrs. McConnell and her committee. In 1915, however, government policies changed with the election of the new Labor government that considered health a state responsibility. This should be seen in a context where the state government aimed to nationalize a number of key industries for the welfare of its citizens, entering the meat, sugar, and insurance industries, buying mines in the north, and taking over the Golden Casket lottery, as well as buying into smaller commercial ventures (Fitzgerald, 1984).

The relationship between the voluntary sector and government services will be examined through the role played by the Mothercraft Association of Queensland (MAQ), 1931-1961, in promoting government services and finding grey areas in which to contribute to maternal and child welfare. In Queensland, as in other states, women doctors were prominent in the infant welfare movement, and successive presidents of the MAQ were always medical women. Dr. Phyllis D. Cilento (later Lady Cilento, after her husband was knighted) eventually became the best-known through her prolific medical journalism and her radio broadcasts on mothercraft. Her papers, in the Fryer Library at the University of Queensland, have provided valuable information for this article.

THE BEGINNINGS OF GOVERNMENT CLINICS IN QUEENSLAND

Queensland's first infant welfare clinics were established by the state government in 1918, all in inner Brisbane suburb (Cilento, 1967, p. 11). This contrasted with the situation interstate, such as in Melbourne and Sydney, where community organizations established the first "baby clinics." However, Queensland, like other states, embraced the infant care system devised by the influential New Zealander, Sir Frederick Truby King, after Queensland nurses were sent to be trained in Sydney and Dunedin, New Zealand. Subsequently, the new Child Welfare Training School established in Brisbane in 1924 implemented a modified form of the Truby King system of training for its nurses (Cilento, 1967).

The government, rather than local community organizations, provided all buildings for the baby clinics, either purpose-built or rented. Non-governmental participation was discouraged (Cilento, 1967, pp. 19-20). Selby (1990, p. 200) notes that the Queensland Countrywomen's Association (QCWA) was, however, enlisted to provide rental accommodation for sub-clinics in QCWA halls and to publicize clinic times. This organization also provided hostels in country towns where pregnant women from rural areas could stay while waiting to give birth in the government's new maternity hospitals (Pagliano, 1999). To enable baby clinic staff to contact each new mother in Queensland and increase the influence of the service and its supposed benefits to health, the state government enacted legislation in 1932 to make registration of all births mandatory and oblige the district registrar to notify the nearest baby clinic of every birth (*Queensland Year Book 1945*, 1946).

THE MOTHERCRAFT ASSOCIATION OF QUEENSLAND

Earlier, Dr. Alfred Jefferis Turner, the Director of Infant Health, had been concerned that many mothers were not attending baby clinics. He believed that voluntary organizations of middle-class women should be recruited to support

maternal and child welfare in Queensland, as in southern states. Consequently, in 1931 he approached Cilento, then convenor of the Health Standing Committee of the National Council of Women, urging her to set up a committee that could conduct mothercraft education, encourage mothers to attend the state baby clinics, and work collaboratively with the Government to establish a mothercraft “home,” that is, a residential facility where mothers go after discharge from the hospital to learn baby care, and where babies with feeding difficulties would be managed (Cilento, 1967, p. 13). As will be shown, this collaboration between government and voluntary sectors was never achieved. Turner, a gentle, altruistic man, made his approach to the National Council of Women during a short break in the Labor party’s four decades in office and appears to have been unaware of the political implications.

The Mothercraft Association of Queensland (MAQ) was formed on October 14, 1931 at a public meeting called by the National Council of Women, with Cilento as founding president. The MAQ’s focus was the education of young women in mothercraft and cooperation with the state government and other organizations (Cilento, 1967, pp. 13-14). One of the association’s objectives was to cooperate with the state government to establish and maintain a residential mothercraft home. Another objective was to “assist outlying localities to establish and maintain Branch Baby Clinics in their own districts, the staff and conduct of these clinics to be subject to the approval of the Director of Infants [sic] Welfare in Queensland” (Cilento, 1967, pp. 13-14). It was not possible to effect either of these objectives, though, as will be shown, a residential facility was eventually established, but separately from the government service.

One of the MAQ’s first undertakings was a series of mothercraft lectures, conducted after hours in the baby clinic building in the popular shopping district of Fortitude Valley (Cilento, 1967, p. 14). For many years the organization also published *Mothercraft*, an annual book in magazine format edited by Cilento and sold in newsagencies. During the hard times of the 1930s, the MAQ published *Square Meals for the Family* (Cilento, 193–), a booklet of inexpensive menu ideas and recipes. The publication of *Square Meals for the Family* offended the state government, which saw the book’s focus on financial hardship as an affront to its image as a welfare state. The *Mothercraft* annual continued for some years under Lady Cilento’s editorship after the MAQ was dissolved.

After Labor, with its policy of being the provider of welfare for its citizens, returned to government in 1932, participation in maternal and child welfare by volunteer organizations was prevented (Cilento, 1967, pp. 15-16). However, the MAQ adapted itself to meet the change in expectations, trying not to step on the government’s toes but continuing to provide mothercraft education and encouragement to mothers to attend the government baby clinic (Cilento, notebooks). Obviously, the restrictions on voluntary involvement meant that establishing a mothercraft home in partnership with the government was no longer a possibility. Occasionally, this voluntary organization of middle-class women was able to find

a small amount of leeway, thanks to members' contacts. For instance, the MAQ contributed when the free government handbook for mothers was revised after Cilento's husband, Dr. (later Sir) Raphael Cilento became Director-General of Health and Medical Services in Queensland in 1934. The association was also represented on the Nutrition Council that he established (Cilento, 1987, p. 100).

Another successful inroad into the government's domain came about in 1934 when the Director of Education allowed the MAQ into state schools to teach mothercraft. These classes were taught by a "treble certified Sister," that is, a nurse with certificates in general nursing, midwifery, and child health (Cilento, 1967, p. 16). The MAQ's mothercraft classes were extended to technical and domestic science schools and a private school for girls, but the service was limited to Brisbane because of financial constraints. The MAQ continued to conduct these classes in schools until 1946, when it asked the government to take them over. Even so, mothercraft classes did not extend into schools in other parts of the state until 1966.

Despite the government's exclusion of the voluntary sector from any involvement in the funding or management of the baby clinics, private baby clinics did exist in Brisbane, certainly in the postwar period. In a minor way they competed with the government service and it is surprising that they did not appear to face the same restrictions as the voluntary sector did. Perhaps this was because their owners never sought any partnership with the government. A private baby clinic was conducted by Sister Robinson in the suburb of Albion (Thorley, 2000, p. 161), and an advice service with visiting nurse was run from the office of the Nestlé company, the large multinational company marketing the artificial baby milks Vi-Lactogen and Lactogen (Nestlé, n.d., back cover).

World War II provided MAQ members with opportunities for welfare work, its members' extensive voluntary work being part of the wider context of women's unpaid work during this period (Oppenheimer, 1996). The MAQ established a War Service Bureau to assist mothers and children of servicemen in cases of hardship, negotiating with the military authorities for compassionate leave where necessary. According to Cilento (notebooks, n.d.), a voluntary body could adapt to meet changing needs and act quickly, whereas government departments were constrained by red tape.

Family welfare work with the military revealed a lack of facilities for the emergency care of children—for instance, when the mother of a young family became ill, a particular difficulty during the war years with the father away in the services. This led to the implementation of one of the association's original goals: the establishment of a mothercraft home. The editor of the *Courier-Mail* provided the MAQ with publicity over a particularly sad case, and later the newspaper provided the association with excellent publicity in support of its fundraising for a hostel. A house in the suburb of Bowen Hills was purchased and became the MAQ's Mothercraft Hostel and After-Care Home with minimal fees (Cilento, notebooks). When larger premises were later required, the *Courier-Mail* again

lent its support, publishing human-interest articles and fundraising tallies (*Courier-Mail*, 1944a), and recording the move to Clayfield in a photo story (*Courier-Mail*, 1944b).

The MAQ was already training young women in mothercraft, to be employed as home helpers by new mothers. The establishment of the hostel enabled the transfer of the classes from the association's rooms in the city to the residential facility. The objective of providing a supply of home helpers was largely thwarted, because most of the trainees used the course as a step toward entry into hospital-based general nursing training, a situation that also occurred with the mothercraft training course in the government's Maternal and Child Welfare homes. The mothercraft course helped fill in some of the time between leaving school and turning 17, the entry age for nurse training. Consequently, few trainees were prepared to work as home helpers (Thorley, 2000, p. 43). For other reasons, other providers of emergency home help, the QCWA Emergency Housekeeper Scheme and the Red Cross, were also desperately short of women to employ through the 1940s and 1950s (Pagliano, 1999).

Usually mothers who stayed in the MAQ's mothercraft hostel at Clayfield were there for antenatal or postnatal care, or to recover from illness. It was also a place for country mothers to stay while taking their children for daily medical treatment, and it provided accommodation for servicemen's wives suffering hardship (*Courier-Mail*, 1945). During the 12 months to October 1945, the facility cared for 116 mothers, 100 babies, and 366 other children. Despite a state government grant toward running costs, the mothercraft home ran at a loss that year, and an appeal was made for annual subscribers as a means of fundraising. The *Courier-Mail* continued its support, with a mid-1946 photo story promoting the home and its trainee home assistants (*Courier-Mail*, 1946). In 1947, the home was renamed the Lady Cilento Hostel and After-Care Home, on the eve of Cilento's departure to join her husband at his United Nations posting in New York.

Despite the set routine that was a feature of the mothercraft movement, public or non-government, innovations were being made. The *Courier-Mail* featured rooming-in for mothers and their babies in a 1949 report of the opening of the new wing of the Lady Cilento Mothercraft and After-Care Hostel (*Courier-Mail*, 1949). Rooming-in, where mothers had their babies with them in their rooms, provided the opportunity for mothers to get to know their babies and gain confidence before going home. In the days when maternity hospitals and the government's Maternal and Child Welfare facilities routinely housed babies in central nurseries, and when middle-class parents aspired to a separate nursery for the baby at home, the introduction of rooming-in was newsworthy.

In a sense, the Mothercraft Association of Queensland, in the most ladylike way, competed with the government in establishing one of the state's first mothercraft and after-care home. The state government's first MCW home to be specifically established as such, was opened on Riverton Street, Clayfield in 1943 (Cilento, 1987, pp. 99-100). Previously, however, mothers had been

accommodated with their babies on the top floor of the Valley clinic, dating from *before* the MAQ opened its home. Other government-run homes were opened in provincial areas, all following a strict feeding and handling regimen.

The MAQ hostel charged modest fees and the well-publicized innovations initially provided an edge over the state's free service. Lady Cilento's clippings book of the period demonstrates that the MAQ had developed and maintained excellent relations with the print media (Cilento, clippings book). News items on the MAQ and the mothercraft hostel appeared regularly in the *Courier-Mail*, *Telegraph*, and *Truth* during this period, with advertisements for MAQ courses and lectures also appearing in metropolitan and regional newspapers.

The Lady Cilento Hostel operated until 1961. According to Cilento, its closure was largely due to the expense of employing a fully trained staff and declining numbers of mothers and children, because the government offered a free service.

The absolutely free accommodation offered to mothers, babies, and children by Government at the now established Mothercraft Homes and at Sandgate Home now fulfilled the needs of the many and even the small fees charged by the Hostel proved beyond the means of those who had previously found the Hostel such a boon. In fact, the Mothercraft Hostel had largely outlived its usefulness. . . . It could have continued to function . . . if the professional executives of the Association had been content with fewer trained Staff but they would not lower this standard and recommended its discontinuance (Cilento, notebooks).

The MAQ handed over the building to the Creche and Kindergarten Association as a residential hostel for its students. As the MAQ's constitution prevented it from donating its assets without going into liquidation, the association was dissolved.

Cilento is probably correct in believing that, when the MAQ was dissolved in October 1961, it had completed its work (Cilento, 1967, p. 5). Following its dissolution, Cilento graciously gave the government's maternal-child health services her unstinting personal endorsement in her weekly "Medical Mother's Opinion" column in the *Courier-Mail* (Cilento, 1961). She looked beyond organizational interests, and whatever may have been her private feelings, to the key purpose underlying the MAQ's original objectives; that is, increased availability of mothercraft information and the provision of residential mothercraft facilities.

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Direct reprint requests to:

Virginia Thorley
4/14 Moreton Street
Norman Park, QLD 4170
Australia
e-mail: vgthorley@ozemail.com.au