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REPORT FROM NATIONAL HOMEBIRTH GET-TOGETHER, CANBERRA, APRIL 17 - 20 1981

Home Birth Australia (HBA) had a lusty birth - Apgar 10 - in Canberra over the Easter weekend. Conceived at a Conference two years ago, its birth as a national organisation was facilitated and aided by concerned parents and birth attendants from all over Australia, and even representatives from New Zealand and UK - the latter an American who did her midwifery training in England - Marianne Scruggs.

Henny Ligtermoet of Perth, antenatal teacher and author (with Margaret Ireland) of Responsible Homebirth, was unanimously elected as national convener. A constitution is to be drawn up.

The aims of the Conference were to allow those involved in Homebirth in Australia to meet each other abd share their skills and difficulties, and from this to set aims and make resolutions on a national level.

National aims included: political lobbying, consumer rights, health fund-funding, midwifery status and training improvements, communication between homebirth groups, public information, improving hospital management of normal labours, controlled studies of planned homebirth/hospitalbirths, and liaison woth world-wide homebirth movement.

The Conference was held at Canberra College of Advanced Education, Kinnari Street, Bruce, ACT. Registration was $25.00 for a family, $20.00 single, $10.00 per day, with concessional rates also. A creche was provided, manned mainly by fathers.

After a meeting of organisers and resource people on Thursday evening, the real work began on Friday morning, with two sessions each day, ending with informal meal and social get-togethers each evening. It wound up on Manday, April 20th at 1 p.m.

Australian midwives have much greater antenatal involvement thando N.Z. midwives. In Canberra, for instance, the midwife, Lorraine Pollard, who does approx 50 homebirths p.a. works with two doctors who have their surgeries in the same clinic. Wednesday mornings she attends this clinic and shares in the AN checks. Here, also the Canberra Homebirth Assn provide a play centre, meeting place and library for homebirth mothers, as well as serving herbal teas.

In Sydney some midwives do the AN care while others share with doctors. Most make at least four AN visits to the woman's home - but they are paid by the parents, homebirth is not free in Australia.

Women can go to public hospital clinics which are free or go to their own GP/obs and have private facilities for which they pay, and for which they can claim a rebate from Government sponsorered Medibank (voluntary) of $150 - $200. or from private health schemes for doctors' fees only.

Australian midwives charge from $240.00 to $375.00 per birth which includes AN classes and visits, labour, delivery and varying periods of post natal care. For example:

Canberra: $350 for primip; $250 for other; includes 4 AN visits, and 10 days post natal coverage
Sydney: varies with the mw, from $250.00 to $375.00 the latter including 6 weekly AN classes; while one charges by the hour.
Adelaide: $250.00 (Rosey Smart and one part-time, Julie Pratt.
Perth: $330.00 (which includes $10.00 booking fee for the HB Assn) and provides 5 AN classes, 10 PN visits
Melbourne: $350 for primip, $300.00 for other; mainly doctor orinted - Drs John Stevenson and Peter Lucas who use birth attendants whom they have trained and whom they pay - $50 - $60.00 per labour with extra for any post natal visits
Darwin: $$300.00 includes 2 AN and 2 post natal visits. There are 2 mws.
Sunshine Coast, Qsld, $280.00 includes 5 AN visits. Two mws & 2 doctors involved. This group are preparing a cookbook on nutrition for pregnancy, lactation and babies' early food.
Atherton Tablelands has a birth attendant, Elaine Bruce, RN who gets paid in jars of honey, etc., if she's lucky.

Canberra provides a Birth Kit which contains oxygen and mask, suction, laryngoscope, ET tube, IV set, plasma. This the paretns obtain from the Canberra HBA and pay $50.00 - $40.00 for the use of the gear and $10.00 for the HBA. The $40.00 is to cover the capital cost of the equipment. The Canberra Hospital, which is very cooperative, provides the Birth

Bundle containing linen, clamps, bowls, suture pack, etc. The principal nurse of Canberra Hospital Obstetric Section, Lesley Barclay, attended a session of the Conference and is sympathetic to homebirth. This obstetric unit would be a good place for N.Z. nurses to apply for midwifery training now that N.Z.'s practical midwifery course has been eliminated!

Adelaide Hospital also provides the midwives' delivery gear. All areas have found a much better attitude to transfers from homebirth as the result of the homebirth movement; also as both private and public facilities are available, they can pick and choose.

Homebirth Support groups fulfill varying functions. In Canberra, each expectant homebirth family has two previous homebirth families assigned to it as near their own neighbourhood as possible. These old hands visit and support the expectant family on a one-to-one basis during pregnancy, in labour if necessary and postnatally, and usually form long term friendships. The stress is on a collective (sharing, giving) activity rather than a consumer (taking) exercise. That is, that a lot of energy goes into makinf homebirth a safe and organised viable alternative, so therefore couple availing themsleves of this privilege are expected to return that energy to the movement. This is a concept that the NZHBA could have a good look at, especially as couples here do not have to pay for the service, and except for the dedicated few, tend to accept it as a hand-out! Another aspect we could look at is the homebirth levy which ranged from $2.00 to $10.00 per birth to support the HBAssns. The concept of a specified levy was put forward by Conference for all HBAs to institute as a regular practise.

There is official opposition to homebirth in Australia as in N.Z. One HB doctor, Peter Lucas, 6 Bruce Street, Boxhill 3128, Victoria, has contacted the American College of Home Obstetrics, 664 North Michigan Ave., Suite 600, Chicago, Ill, 60611, with a view to setting up a similar organisation in Australia. One of our Auckland doctors has also made such a move. Discuss this possibility with your HB doctors - this internation -al solidarity is going to be vital!

Peter also noted that his incidence of interference in his hospital deliveries had gone down since he has been doing home births.

In the area of lobbying, both the Sydney HB groups - HB Assn Sydney (HAS) which evolved from Parents Centres and HB Acess (HBA) which grew out of the Leichhardt Women's Centre have sent a number of submissions to the NSW government concerning legislation affecting homebirth which arose out of the Edith Gosling case. They supported Edith in principle; Edith was deregistered and required to do a refresher course to regain her registration.

At its final session, the Conference issued a press statement which contained the following points:

1) Recommendation to reinstate the direct entry midwifery training;
2) That private health insurance policies pay domiciliary midwives on an equal basis with doctors, pointing out that homebrith parents are paying twice - direct and through taxes.
3) That the public hospital system (which is under threat) be retained; This was seen as a back-up for homebirth transfers.
4) That homebirth midwives have the right to join the Royal Australian Nursing Federation. (In one case such a midwife was excluded)
5) They asked for an international definition of post partum haemorrhage - which ranges from 300 - 1000 mls (Holland is 1000 mls)
6) They endorsed the WHO definition of a midwife.
* 7) They declared a National Homebirth Week - 25 October to 31 October. (This date was selected as Hallowe'en, 31 Oct, is the night witches are out!) It is intended to contact NAPSAC with a view to making this an annual international event.
8) They called for research funds for controlled comparative studies between home and hospital births. (There is already a Commonwealth Statistical survey into childbirth in Australia under Dr. Lancaster.)
9) They called for a national enquiry into the management of maternity services.

A number of publicity mechanisms were displayed. All groups had car stickers: PUSH FOR PLEASURE (Melb); EINSTEIN WAS BORN AT HOME (Sydney), as well as the usual SUPPORT HOMEBIRTH. Sydney also displayed children's T-shirts with 'I WAS BORN AT HOME' on them.

The Australian Nurses Journal, P.O. Box 197, Port Adelaide, SA 5015, Edna Davis, editor, is welcoming articles on homebirth. This is a new publication, and parents and birth attendants are urged to submit articles before advertisers clamp down. Henny related how she was asked to write an article on homebirth for The New Doctor for their special issue on home birth, and although it was advertised on their cover, it never appeared, and neither has she been able to get her copy back.

A suggestionnwas made to interest Consumer Affairs to do an article or pamphlet on homebirth

An interesting session was the special fathers' session. They discussed the fragile nature of homebirth support with reliance on a few lay people with few fathers involved, although they felt fathers can and want to augment support - more than just child care which gave them a feeling of exclusion/alienation when attending meetings. They asked, 'Is there a 'feminist' problem for fathers within the homebirth movement?' and 'How important is the formation of friendship between fathers in the movement - locally and internationally?' They recommended a fathers' network be developed; investigation of resources which can be tapped to help homebirth and a fathers' support group as part of the overall movement with father contribution to homebirth publications.

An aura of enthusiasm and great solidarity emanated from the Conference.

Each provincial association agreed to affiliate with the National organisation through payment of a tithe (1/10th of total membership fees) N.Z. affiliated and made a token apyment of $4.00 (A). Affiliation requires that at least three copies of each newsletter be sent to Henny as National Convener, as well as an annual statistical report and any submissions or reports made. Henny will go through these and in turn send out edited reports in a National Newsletter. Groups are asked to mark matters of special importance to make Henny's work easier. It was also agreed that provincial groups would exchange newsletters at no subscription costs. * A register of professionals (doctors and midwives) and non-professionals involved in planned homebirth was suggested. For political reasons, 'lay midwives' are called birth attendants which then can also include midwives and doctors! It was also felt to be important to try and keep a record of unattended homebirths wherever possible.

Sometime was spent on discussion of a uniform, comprehensive stat form. The N.Z. midwives' stat form was submitted, and Henny supplied a list she felt was relevant (see below), while Rosey Smart provided two pages of a three page stat form used by the S.A. Perinatal stats (xeroxed, and she lost the third page). It was also suggested to keep a record of ultrasound scans, and what drugs (DES) mothers or grandmothers of women were given during their pregnancies. There have been approx 2500 planned home births in Australia since 1974, and approx 850 in N.Z.

There will be a get-together next year in Adelaide (or Melbourne) and a Conference in Sydney in 1983. The International Midwives Conference is also slated for Sydney in 1983.

Many thanks are due to the Canberra Homebirth Assn for making this Conference the success it was, and in particular to Jane Witham and Barbara Chevalier who put so much energy, skill and hard work into the day-to-day running.

* Regular newsletters are put out by:
Perth: Homebirth, 21 Wandina Place, Duncraig, W.A. 6023
Melbourne: Newsletter, Home Birth Group, c/- Coonera Community House, Willow Rd, Upper Ferntree Gully, Vict 3156
Sydney: Homebirth Access Newsletter, 52 Macaulay Rd, Stanmore, NSW 2048
Parents Centres Australia, Homebirth Branch I do not have an address for them

Henny's Stat form - called a Birth Report.

Name Birth No.
Address Date
Parity Blood Group Age
Father
Obstetric History
This pregnancy
Preparation
EDD
Precursers
Labour: Contractions began (pre-labour)
Regular contractions began
Strong contractions began
Transition
Pushing
Head on view
Crowning
Birth of head
Birth completed
Cord pulse stopped
Placenta expelled
Perineum
Blood loss
Medication
Placenta
BABY: Sex Weight Summary and remarks
Present: Family Relatives Friends Medical

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Additional addresses and notes

Henny Ligtermoet, 1A Shoalwater Rd, Shoalwater, WA 6169 Ph 095 27 2033
Canberra Homebirth Assn, P.O. Box 86, O'Connor, ACT 2601
Lorraine Pollard, mw, 15 Wandoo St, O'Connor 2601, ACT
Sydney: HAS - Carolyn Spruell, 9 Bromborough Rd, Roseville, 2069, NSW
HBA, Women's Health Centre, 52 Macauley Rd, Stanmore 2048, NSW
Melbourne: Homebirth Group, P.O. Box 2, Northcote, 3070 Vict
Adelaide: Rosey Smart, mw, 8 Bellaview Rd, Flagstaff, 5159, SA 08 298 2324
Sunshine Coast Homebirth Assn, P.O. Box 151, Tewantin, 4565, Qsld.
(Cairns has three mws and one doctor)
Atherton Tablelands, Elaine Bruce, RN, birth attendant,
16 Patrick Rd, Malinda 4885 070 965 281
Toowoomba, Dr Jim Stuart, 124B Russell St, Toowoomba 4350
076 324 045
Marianne Scruggs, 96 Harberton Rd, London N19, England 263 5822 mw
Gwenda Stevenson, 14 Winwood Drive, Ferntree Gulley, 3156, Vict
birth attendant.

Signed: Joan Donley
3 Hendon Ave.,
Auckland 3. 887 759

P.S. I brought back 10 copies of 'Responsible Childbirth' sold to us for $A2.50 ($NZ 3.12), which we can sell for $A3.75 ($NZ 4.69(with the profit going to NZ HBA.

And I buggered the stencil putting this P.S. on!

Barbara MacFarlane
11 Manapau Rd, Meadowbank