

Now we'll be 50!

This year, Young Media Australia joins illustrious others, such as Dr Seuss' *The Cat in the Hat*, actor Rachel Ward, cartoonist Scott Adams (*Dilbert*), musician Elena Kats-Chernin, and comedian Dawn French in turning 50.

On March 30 1957, the then Australian Council for Children's Films and TV was formed in Melbourne by Lady Alice Paton and a band of enthusiastic supporters.

In the early years, Alice Paton, parent and science graduate of the University of Melbourne, and her co-workers in the Victorian Council for Children's Films and TV, along with Newman Rosenthal the Director of Visual Aids at the University of Melbourne, Bill Perkins of the Tasmanian Council for Children's Films and TV and others worked very hard to give children access to films specifically made for them. They used links with J Arthur Rank and Mary Field who made children's films for that organisation, to create a supply of films to support regular screenings around Australia, and fought battles over tariffs to allow films in. Mary Field's visit to Australia served as a catalyst for the development of screenings for children in several states.

As the supply of children's films was insufficient to meet the demand, Alice Paton with the support of Ed Schefferle of the State Film centre in Victoria, searched for films made in Australia. Early films made for children around this time included *Smiley* (UK, 1956) and *Smiley Gets a Gun* (UK, 1958). Locally-made films included Tim Burstall's *The Prize* (1958), and Bill Perkins' and Charles Wolnizer's *Weekend at Cradle Mountain* (1960). The ACCFT involved itself in the production of Australian films for children, and *They Found a Cave* (1962) and *Nullarbor Hideout* (1965) resulted.

Advocacy for the production of Australian films and TV for children continued, with the support of producers such as John McCallum, Godfrey Phillip, Nancy Cato, and Phillip Adams. The ACCFT also advocated strongly in relation to classification issues over many years.

With the formation in 1973 of the SA Council for Children's Films and TV by Max Pearson and Eileen Sharman, came the establishment of the groundbreaking biennial Children's International Film Festivals which were held in Adelaide

between 1975 and 1990. Eileen and Marion Sullivan worked for many long hours to ensure their success.

SA's Barbara Biggins, along with Victoria's Sarah Guest, and NSW's Julie James Bailey had much interest and expertise in advocacy for children's needs related to TV, and ACCFT efforts in advocacy in this area increased significantly from 1975. In 1977 and 1978 these volunteers presented effective and critical submissions to both the newly established Australian Broadcasting Tribunal's Self Regulation inquiry, and the Senate Select Committee's inquiry into the impact of children. The state Councils actively participated in the TV Licence Renewal process which began with Adelaide's stations in 1978.



Lady Alice Paton CBE, BSc, Dip. Ed, LL.D(Hon)

In the 80s, the ACCFT members served on the Tribunal's Children's Program Committee, and on the ABC's and other stations' advisory Councils. The ACCFT worked to support the establishment of the Australian Children's TV Foundation. It also held a number of conferences in association with its Annual Meetings on current media issues, inviting Ministers (such as Tony Staley and John Button) and industry representatives (eg James Malone and David Morgan of FACTS) to contribute. The ACCFT also lobbied effectively to ensure that home videos were subject to the same classification process and system as films.

However, the advent of the home video, resulted in a significant downturn in local film screenings for children, and associated loss of income for both the national body and its state members. The ACCFT's efforts to raise funds through video distribution, while initially successful, were not sufficient to maintain viability. This, accompanied by loss of key grants from the Australian Film Commission resulted in a change of focus and organisational structure from the beginning of the 90s.

The struggle for age appropriate media for children continued.

Part 2 - The ACCFT: the 90s and beyond follows in next month's small screen.

