

A Great Day for Children's Rights

Australian Human Rights Medal



• The founder of the Australian Section of Defence for Children International, Helen Bayes, has been awarded the 1999 Australian Human Rights Medal. In the citation for this award the judges noted the way in which Helen, as the unpaid National Co-ordinator, has built up DCI's role, credibility and networks especially in the fields of child labour, juvenile justice, sexual exploitation and ending violence towards children. Sir Ronald Wilson presented the medal to Helen on 10 December last year, saying that he had been particularly moved by the story of her long commitment, capacity and energy for this work and her recent focus on the effects of mandatory sentencing on indigenous children in WA and NT.

In accepting the award, Helen said that the core issue is respecting the human dignity of children. The Convention on the Rights of the Child provides the best framework for relating to children and giving them services. She called for systematic education about the rights of the child for every new parent and every family registering a child for primary school and high school and for eve-

ryone who works with and for children.

Surely, she said, a country like Australia can afford a specialist commissioner for children at national level and in every state and territory.

Finally, she commented on the difficulties that many human rights



Helen Bayes at the Human Rights Awards (Photo: HREOC) organisations have in raising financial support from the community. She called on the National Parliament provide to tax concessions to community-based human rights organisations, equivalent to those available for

environmental advocacy bodies and welfare agencies.

Helen Bayes came to Australia in 1966 as a £10 migrant and finally fell in love with the country during the visionary years of the Whitlam government.

Other award winners:

The inaugural Human Rights Youth Medal was won by Homebush Boys High School Captain Prashanth Shanmugan for his energetic campaign to promote multiculturalism.

The National Children's and Youth Law Centre won the Community Award.

The Age Newspaper once again won the print category, with *Terminal Neglect*, a special report on young people in nursing homes by Julie-Anne Davies and Bill Birnbauer.

Chris Bullock and Dai Le of ABC Radio's *Background Briefing* program won the radio category for their program *A Foreign Student's Story: A Cautionary Tale* about a Vietnamese boy sent alone to Australia to attend school.

Helen Dalley and Paul Steindl of *Sunday* on Channel 9 won the Television Award for *Solutions for a Secret Shame* about domestic violence in Indigenous communities and the power of ordinary people in creating positive social change.

Sid Spindler writes:

It was a marvellous privilege to be present at the Human Rights Commission function in Sydney, with many other people, when Helen received her medal.

Too often the kind of selfless, committed and tenacious work Helen has done for decades goes unnoticed - not that she would mind, except that such recognition also helps the cause which has, I suspect, given meaning to her life, in addition to her family, of course.

Her husband Richard and daughter Suzi, who were also there, cheerfully admitting that they were pleased to play the extras in what is a long running string of Helen/DCI productions.

It was typical of Helen to use the opportunity to push for tax deductibility - pity the Treasurer wasn't there - but while we are grateful for yet another goal kicking exercise this should not overshadow the joy of the occasion and the well-deserved thank you, Helen.



Sid Spindler is DCI Advisory Panel member and President of the Anti-Slavery Society Australia