

# farewell Jo Comans

After a long and distinguished career in family day care, Jo Comans is moving on from Family Day Care Australia...seeking new challenges and more time with her four grandchildren.

Jo Comans began her family day care career at Tuggeranong Community Services in Canberra in 1981. Over a six year period she held positions as a family day care fieldworker, coordinator, project manager and assistant director. In late 1986 Jo and her family moved to the Central Coast of NSW where she took up the role of Director of Gosford Family Day Care Scheme supporting and resourcing over 90 carers and a large staff team.

overseas. Her three month tour took her to the United Kingdom, Sweden, Denmark, Belgium and the United States where she reviewed quality assurance practice, employer support and competency standards. Churchill Fellows *'are ordinary Australians – but with extraordinary goals. What distinguishes a Churchill Fellow is that he or she is invariably talented, has the ability to go that little bit extra, and has the determination to*



Jo's interest in family day care policy and lobbying extended to active involvement in, and executive positions held on, both the NSW and ACT State Associations. She played a key role in the establishment of Family Day Care Australia (then the National Family Day Care Council of Australia (NFDCCA)) in 1988-89.

After negotiating a one year leave of absence from Gosford Family Day Care, Jo established the national office of NFDCCA in a small fibro cottage in Avoca Beach as the inaugural Executive Officer of the association. In 1991 the organisation was successful in obtaining Federal funding for a limited term of four years, during which time the organisation was required to become self sufficient.

In 1993 Jo applied for a Churchill Fellowship to study family day care

*share the results of their Fellowship with the community upon their return to Australia'.*

Meanwhile back in Avoca Beach, successful lobbying for funds for both the Tax Guide for Carers and research into insurance needs came to fruition; the national insurance plan was launched and over 8,000 carers took up public liability insurance in the first three months. More staff were hired and by the time Jo returned a 'team' had emerged.



Later that year the report of the Churchill Fellowship trip – *Family Day Care Around the World* – was

published by NFDCCA. The report was dedicated to Wendy Loasby, the family day care carer who looked after Jo's then six-year-old son Casey, delivering extra special care while his mum was away at 'the church on the hill', as Casey called the Churchill Fellowship.

In 1994 Jo served as an Honorary Consultant to the Australian Law Reform Commission, appointed to provide expert advice on a major and comprehensive review of all legislation relating to child care across Australia. The review involved analysis and commentary on current legislation as well as advice and input on the development of proposed legislative change.

By 1996 NFDCCA was well on the way to financial self-sufficiency. Under Jo's leadership a business plan was developed

and funding to implement the plan obtained. Membership and JIGSAW were the major new strategies, and the insurance plan continued its success. A year later the national office moved into the CBD of Gosford with a staff of 12 and a new structure. Jo's role of Executive Director Secretariat had responsibility for policy, lobbying, advocacy and consultation.

In 1999 Jo was an inaugural member of the Sydney Leadership Program – a program designed by the NSW Benevolent Society to 'drive social innovation'. Each year up to 32 outstanding leaders are competitively selected from business, government and non-profit organisations. The program spanned ten months and included program days, a rural study trip and weekend retreats covering topics such as youth, law and justice, education, health, resilient communities, values and ethics, corporate responsibility and media.

In May 2003 she was awarded the Centenary Medal, acknowledging citizens who contributed to Australian society during the 100 years of federation. Her award was for services to the Commonwealth Childcare Advisory Council and to the family day care program.

In 2005 Jo took up a new challenge – that of National Marketing Manager with Family Day Care Australia. Jo considered this *'an absolute gift...to be given the opportunity to now use all that I have learned and become to 'sell' the service, to define it, to revel in the best of what family day care is, to challenge our competitors' claims and come up trumps – proud of what we are and proud to tell the world all about us.'*

In 2006 Jo managed a range of projects, including:

'Let's get building' designed to attract potential carers to family day care

Now at the end of her journey with Family Day Care Australia Jo is moving on ... seeking new challenges and more time with her beloved grandchildren - Georgia, Claudia, Madeline and Tom.

She recently commented:

*'When I commenced my journey with Family Day Care Australia (then NFDCCA) in December 1989, I had no idea what the organisation would or could become or just what an impact it would have on my whole life.*

*The journey has been one of learning, growing, achieving ... amazing experiences and opportunities ... tough times and great times ... and as I would say to my youngest son Casey when I could not be there for him from time to*



Bron Lowe and Jo



With FDCA staff at marketing campaign launch



Jo's beautiful grandchildren Tom, Claudia, Georgia and Madeline

Jo's reputation as a passionate advocate and national leader for family day care led to her selection on successive Commonwealth Childcare Advisory Committees providing high level advice to ten Ministers over 13 years. Jo remains the only individual who has served on each and every such committee in the history of Australian childcare. From 2003-2005 Jo was a member of the Australian Council for Children and Parenting which provided strategic advice in the areas of early childhood intervention, parenting and child protection, foster care and emerging early childhood initiatives.

In 2002 Jo was elected to the Board of Families Australia – the first national non-government peak body specifically concerned with family-related issues – where she served until 2005.

- the design and implementation of the first ever national logo for family day care, including branding, images, program blueprint and five star standard promotional tool, and subsequent public relations and advertising campaign
- a major national recruitment marketing campaign launched in April 2006 at Luna Park by the Minister for Family, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Mal Brough
- the national pilot recruitment project which established an alliance between family day care schemes and Job Network members
- the design and launch of two recruitment websites – the recruiters' resource designed for schemes, and

*time... "Mummy is doing this for the little children of Australia."*

*And this has been my truth...for my work with Family Day Care Australia has been my vocation, my calling and I have dedicated more than my time and my effort and my energy, but the best of my heart and spirit to working to nurture and grow this remarkable childcare service and the women who deliver it to Australian families.'*

Farewell Jo – and thank you – from everyone whose lives you have touched over your 26 year career in family day care. We all wish you the very best for the future. 🌸