

# Canberra ... she's a beauty but ...





Yet it is still possible to be lonely in Canberra in spite of all these activities going on — as Life Line with more than 200 calls a year about 'social isolation' can verify.

The Life Line organisation maintains that assistance is as close as the nearest telephone whatever the problem, whether a minor worry or a major crisis, and last year answered 8000 calls for help. With nearly 200 helpers it offers a twenty-four hour service so that people in distress can phone any time, night or day. Its telephone counsellors are trained to put callers immediately at their ease and unburden themselves of their worry. Last year they helped with 860 marital problems and over 700 situations involving families. In



Life Line's twenty-four-hour service in action.

a few minutes of sympathetic listening a positive course of action may be suggested or a visit recommended for personal face-to-face counselling at Life Line's discreet office.

Callers are from all sections of society and at all levels of income, from a young couple straining their finances — and their marriage — trying to keep up with their wealthier neighbours, to the recently-bereaved elderly widow, well-off financially but who needs someone to share her social problems. If the caller on the phone sounds very distressed the counsellor will try to encourage a personal visit or a visit to a doctor. 'It's such a relief to hear a friendly voice and not just a recorded message', is a popular reaction to Life Line's telephone counselling.

Most calls are from the 21-40 age group, concern domestic disagreements, and often take place just before a wife reaches breaking point because of some aspect of her husband's behaviour.

Loneliness and depression appear to affect the under-21s — often they are young people from interstate who are shy in making friends. Few callers are over 60 — senior citizens' clubs and social gatherings appear to take care of the problem of loneliness in the elderly.

## Debts

Sliding into debt has always been easy down through the ages but perhaps it is even simpler these days with the ready availability of credit and seductive advertising.

It can begin with a second car in the household — regarded as an essential and not just to keep up with the Joneses — so that the wife does not feel marooned at home. Often a second job fails to cope with the extra expenses, the shaky harmony in the home disappears and then reports come in to welfare workers about children being neglected or left in the charge of older children for long periods. Firm financial guidelines can be laid down by welfare officers to assist a family get out of debt and if they are in genuine need welfare organisations such as the Smith Family or the St Vincent de Paul Society are contacted for food parcels and household goods.

The Smith Family deals with hundreds of cases of distress every month, mainly from low-income earners who have no reserves to fall back on when unemployment strikes. A number of young people coming from Sydney or Melbourne to look for work, are also helped and even financially-troubled professional men who have settled all other debts but have left little for food and clothing.

Sometimes people unable to find a job feel there is a stigma attached to asking for help and consequently miss out on financial aid to which they are entitled. A typical case is the back-hoe driver who recently lost his job and with his wife in hospital spent the family savings before seeking financial assistance.

## Minding the kids

For working mothers the Department of the Capital Territory's Welfare Branch and other organisations run a wide range of social services. There are day-care centres, fourteen of them run by community groups, some subsidised by government grants, and seven privately-run. Most take children from two to five years but some take younger children. Then there are occasional care centres which temporarily care for young children when for example mothers have urgent medical, business or other appointments. An Emergency Housekeeper and Home Help Service which last year spent \$158 000 of Government money, is also available, on a full or part-time basis, when a mother because of illness or other cause, is temporarily unable to give the necessary attention to her home. The Home Help Service provides assistance on an hourly basis for the aged, physically handicapped, or mothers with young children in an emergency or when sick. Charges are based on family income. There are also many play groups run by parents. Three women's refuges are also available for wives who have been deserted or who have had to

leave home. The refuges are subsidised by the Health Commission and have been given accommodation in government houses.

Some unfortunates, however, just cannot cope with life and spend almost all their lives in distress. It may begin with unsuitable accommodation, a move to a better suburb involving running into debt, being deserted by the husband or an unmarried daughter coming 'home to Mum in Canberra' to have her baby. During 1975-76 more than \$300 000 was paid out in social welfare benefits by the Department of the Capital Territory to ACT residents in temporary need, mainly to deserted wives and unmarried mothers. Seven welfare organisations like the



Lonely? Shy? Not at senior citizens' clubs.

Society of St Vincent de Paul and the Goodwin Homes shared a government grant of \$230 000 which they distributed to the aged, the handicapped and the needy.

Canberra, administered by the Federal Government, is not like other cities where there are elected city fathers and city and local councils. People in the hot seat are the Public Service administrators who are continually under fire. But they do listen, especially to those who have genuine complaints or are in need of assistance.

A notable American town planner, Edmund Bacon, once described Canberra as being 'among the greatest creations of man'.

Canberra, for all its faith in the future and farsightedness, has not yet solved the problems that also beset unplanned cities, the human failings of people living together. However, Canberra, the planned capital of Australia, hopes its understanding of these frailties shows there is more to a city than just a pretty face — that it has humanity under that dignified facade.



**\*Habitat, last year's United Nations' Conference on Human Settlements, achieved its purpose of setting the world contemplating the problems of urban habitation. The administrators of Canberra, Australia's totally planned National Capital, became involved and took the opportunity to examine some of the city's shortcomings . . . and they found some of them, particularly the socio-logical ones, still far from resolved.**

Beauty can be skin deep — and there are many critics of the National Capital who say this old cliché fits young Canberra rather well.

It's not that the Australian capital's handsome exterior fails to evoke admiration. Even the most prejudiced viewer would concede that the first view of Canberra, sparkling so invitingly on the Limestone Plains, can be breathtaking.

It's a city that brings out strong emotional feelings in almost everyone: the tourist merely passing through, or the new resident hopefully putting down permanent roots. Some fall in love with the place immediately, others dislike it from the start and take peevish delight in decrying it.

Canberra has earned many descriptions. Its meagre spread of houses in the early days led to it being called 'good sheep paddocks spoiled'. Today 'The city without a soul' and 'The city of loneliness' are just two of the slurs cast at it.

Those who most appreciate what Canberra offers are often the young and the ambitious who see their future, and their children's, in this planned capital with its good schools, gracious buildings, garden suburbs and an atmosphere unsullied by industrial grime.

And what lies beyond the city? Encircling mountains topped in winter with snow . . . and in the valleys the rivers Murrumbidgee and Cotter with their excellent trout fishing and natural pools for safe summer swimming.

Living in Canberra should and can be idyllic. All the material things are here to make the good life:

- \* It has the highest household income in Australia — \$277 a week compared with \$206 in the States in 1975.
- \* It has the highest car ownership in Australia — 550 vehicles to every 1000 of population.
- \* It has fifty-six government primary schools, six special schools for the handicapped and two hospital schools, fifteen secondary schools and five secondary colleges. There are sixty-eight pre-schools, twenty-six Roman Catholic schools and eight other independent schools. Most are new.

Front cover:  
One of the capital's most memorable sights, the Captain Cook Memorial water-jet . . . (inset) a sight best forgotten . . . a vandalised phone box.

- \* Over 6000 students attend the Australian National University and 4700 the Canberra College of Advanced Education, both of which have up-to-date facilities.
- \* Most housing is modern with 31 000 houses being privately-owned and 11 000 government-owned.
- \* Its citizens attend live theatre, ballet and concerts six times more often than their counterparts in Sydney and Melbourne, and amateur drama and music are flourishing.
- \* Sports of all kinds are played, cricket, football, tennis, hockey and golf being most popular. There are five golf courses, seven swimming pools and sailing on Lake Burley Griffin

The American Walter Burley Griffin whose design of the city won an international competition in 1910, visualised Canberra as a tranquil urban society with a maximum population of 75 000. Progress was slow because of the 1930 Depression and then World War II. In the late 1950s the population was only 39 000. But in the next fifteen to twenty years, under the impetus of Government-inspired expansion of the city, more families were brought in and others joined the rush until the population soared to the present-day 200 000 plus.

But as Canberra grew so did its problems. Bricks, timber, landscape are all easier to shape and control than are people. There is more to a city than spacious suburbs



Children at a modern primary school enjoying their morning recess.

which is kept stocked with trout and perch for fishing. Ski-ing, water skiing, canoeing, rifle and pistol shooting, basketball and hang gliding are also available.

Town planners around the world still use Canberra as a model and praise its planned decentralisation. To these observers it is a unique social laboratory with many advantages, but to some residents and visitors its ordered planning is artificial and almost anti-social. The unplanned city that 'just grewed' like Topsy, they say, offers a homely feeling missing from planned Canberra. But is this a reaction for the familiar as against the unfamiliar?

and a planned environment — there are people, and with them problems, both physical and emotional. Canberra has its share of problems of delinquent children, of loneliness in dormitory suburbs, of excessive drinking, of drug-taking, of people re-housed far removed from relatives and old friends.

## Vandalism

What causes vandalism? How can it be reduced, and redirected into positive activity? Who are the vandals?

Building sites are easy targets for vandals — and Canberra is no exception with its far-flung suburbs. In May 1976 vandal



damage was \$9000, in June \$13 000, in July \$9000, in August \$16 000, a monthly average of \$12 000 — and this is not taking into account the thieving that goes on from building sites. Rumour has it that seaside cottages have been built with materials stolen in Canberra.

At one house under construction a wall which cost \$4500 to replace was pushed over and at another all twenty-eight windows were systematically broken. One new householder complained to the Police of sixty-nine different acts of vandalism to his property.

On one occasion the police tracked down a high school gang with a membership of 112 and to their surprise found a meticulous record had been kept of all their



Vandalism at a construction site.

misdeeds. Points, it seemed, were awarded for housebreaking, car stealing, shoplifting and malicious damage — the more points gained the higher a boy's position in the league.

Recently three girls broke into a high school and attempted to steal school equipment — not valuable electronic gear but, of all things, ballpoint pens!

On Canberra's buses a few minutes with a knife or razor blade on a seat can inflict \$70 worth of damage and put a new \$46 000 bus off the road until the seat is repaired. This kind of thing, plus the usual scribbling on the backs of seats, loosening screws, sticking chewing gum on seats, floors and window crevices, adds up to a repair cost of \$20 000 a year. Why do this to public facilities which can only be bought and maintained at the taxpayers' expense?

When new \$2300 bus shelters began going up around the city some people complained that with their utilitarian shape they looked more like concrete pillboxes. Perhaps pillboxes would have been more fitting for the city's vandals set about them with a vengeance, especially when challenged by the boast that they were vandal-proof.

What kind of background has the Canberra vandal? The police say there is no blueprint for the miscreant. He may be bright scholastically or he may be dim, from a good home environment or a poor one. One sixteen-year-old boy had a fine home and loving parents yet he completed \$16 000 worth of damage before he was

apprehended. Another sprayed paint on an embassy which cost \$600 to sandblast clean.

Social workers argue many Canberra parents have lost the ability to carry out activities as a friendly group — whether it is a simple picnic, a barbecue, or a visit to a sporting event.

One explanation for this neglect, they reason, is that because Canberra has a young population many parents are still youthful enough to be actively involved in adult pursuits that exclude their children. When children are left to fend for themselves boredom sets in and mischief follows.

Some improvement in behaviour may result from Canberra's new education



Schools are often targets for vandals.

system under which fifth and sixth-year students leave high schools and enter colleges. The senior environment of the new colleges should encourage students to behave more responsibly. And the more impressionable youngsters left at school will no longer have their sixth form 'heroes' to emulate with their 'sophisticated' attitude towards drinking, smoking and driving.

Police cannot explain the root cause of vandalism but they are well aware of the danger time — after three o'clock when school comes out and both working parents are not yet home.

## Drinking and drugs

Local surveys on drinking patterns show that Canberra's alcohol consumption is about the same as the rest of Australia. This means that 5% of adult males have a serious alcohol problem. A survey, by interview, showed that 1.4% of males had a daily consumption of ten to twenty glasses of beer. In addition 10.6% of males reported a daily consumption of five to ten glasses. Intermittent excessive drinkers or 'binge' drinkers were not taken into account.

Canberra and Woden Valley hospitals provide emergency care for persons with medical problems related to alcohol abuse but beds are not provided for sobering up or drying out. Mancare run by the Salvation Army has sixteen beds for alcoholics but twelve are for those on the three-month rehabilitation program which requires total abstinence. Four beds are

for relapsed alcoholics. The Shelter for Homeless Men, run by the St Vincent de Paul Society, caters for itinerants some of whom have alcohol problems. It is not a facility for alcoholics and cannot cater for drunks. The Capital Territory Health Commission is seeking further information before making a decision on a therapeutic community for alcohol- and drug-dependent people. It will deal with the derelict alcoholic, the public drunk and the opiate addict. Preventative programs are already under way for parents, school children, teachers and nurses.

You may say "People drink, so what?" According to the 1975 police report drink plays a part in many offences like vagrancy, offensive or indecent behaviour as well as driving under the influence. In all 1024 persons were charged with having a blood alcohol concentration of 0.08% or more. The under-25 age group accounted for 41% of these charged.

Alcoholism killed 55% more Australians last year than ten years ago; it cost the economy \$240 million. It has a deleterious effect on the health of the community and imposes a strain on welfare and health services.

It also figures in many Canberra divorces along with cruelty, adultery and desertion although it is not the chief cause of marriage breakup. Canberra's divorce rate for 1974-75 was the highest of all the capitals — 23.77 per 10 000 of population. The Department of the Capital Territory, which administers Canberra, is conscious of the many social problems in this planned city and is sensitive to the needs of new citizens searching for a feeling of belonging.

It strongly sponsors cultural and community organisations. In 1975-76 it gave the Canberra Theatre Trust an operational subsidy of \$143 000. (Income \$141 000.) The Cultural Development Committee, which provides expert advice on cultural matters in the ACT, recommended other grants totalling \$137 000 for cultural and community organisations in Canberra.

The arts were supported with concerts in shopping centres and many recreation programs were organised for various age groups. Community halls were opened in four suburbs and in two new suburbs government houses were modified to serve as halls.

To encourage newcomers to get into the local scene the Department publishes many booklets and leaflets. One booklet's seventy pages list everything from accommodation, education facilities and shopping centres to tourist attractions, transport services and youth activities.

Another booklet lists more than 400 clubs and associations whose members indulge in nearly every kind of cultural and sporting activity — from church-going to sky-diving, film-making to philosophy discussions, organ recitals to orienteering.