

Editorial

On the global scene in recent weeks and months, many children have witnessed and suffered, as the older generation unleashed a holocaust, engaged in environmental vandalism and declared a victory. A victory literally pyrrhic, followed by an unsafe peace. Actions and reactions consuming vast quantities of resources, resources ample in quantity to address the disease, the hunger, the ignorance, the oppression of so many. Mind boggling levels of resources poured in first to arm aggressors then to destroy them. Can humanity get off this treadmill?



At home, our children and their families, are witnessing the demise of many publicly provided services, as the nation, states and territories and local leaders try desperately to balance their budgets. The savings though, often made at great cost in human terms, appear to be evaporating. Can anyone tell us where it is going? Can we not use our technology, our intellect, our energy, our power, our compassion and our commonsense to protect our environment and promote health, goodwill and safety? Have we lost our way? Perhaps the speed with which we communicate our bad news or the power we put behind our competitive intelligence exceeds our capacity to foresee and cope with unintended consequences. Surely a perspective which holds the needs of children in a paramount position must protest and challenge much of the local and global daily fare. It is more than timely and appropriate that the International Red Cross and Red Crescent should be campaigning for the victims of war. Red Cross and Red Crescent Day is on May 8th this year.

In this issue of Children Australia as usual there are some notes of hope and some of frustration. Again we are reminded of the importance and effectiveness of genuine, respectful, personal attention, shared with dignity in response to family need. The account provided by the team from Maryborough of the Residential Family Treatment Project strikes a note of hope in the child protection field. This evaluation presents a picture of a proactive, creative and successful endeavour.

Another article tackles the subject of evaluation. Max and Margaret Liddell, in recounting their experience at the 1990 National Evaluation Conference, put forward some useful reminders about the traps and dilemmas of program evaluation. The evaluation industry, fed by the somewhat drawn out accountability crisis of the seventies and the eighties, has demanded much from the welfare sector. Its success however in delineating action is extremely variable and the extent to which even powerful and well constructed evaluations fail, when it comes to

implementing timely positive developmental change, is often a concern. The industry now talks of fourth generation evaluation methodologies (Guba and Lincoln 1990 Evaluation Journal of Australasia Vol.2 No.3 1990), hopefully it will help the Australian community to find its way in relation to programs and services for children and their families.

How important is our right to feel safe from human aggression? Frank Bates contributes to this issue with an article exploring concepts and solutions in respect to family violence. In drawing attention to the work of Freeman 1979 he presents some sobering thoughts. Is it really the case

that "From the cradle to the grave we are the objects of violence from those nearest and dearest to us..." Children reared in an environment of violence batter their children and their spouses and in turn may find themselves exposed to violence in their latter years from their own children, who in turn were brought up by violent parents." Those acquainted with the field can attest to the presence of these circumstances in many situations. We are invited to examine some myths and strike out in search of "things as they are" to ultimately give some "institutional expression" of children's rights as they need to be.

Terry Carney stands high on the list of people in Australia who have given painstaking attention to the detail of child welfare practice and legislation. He has joined us in this issue to reflect on child welfare law and practice in the State of Victoria against the international standards now available through the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This contribution is timely as the Victorian Childrens and Young Persons Act 1989 is finally in the process of being proclaimed after its conception in the 1984 review which was chaired by Professor Carney. By the end of March it is envisaged that eighty per cent of the Act will have been proclaimed.

It would seem that one common cause of delay in good programs and good legislation is a shortage of resources. For a long time now most welfare departments have been pressed to make savings and to introduce new programs only when they have cut something else. Some have found ways to become entrepreneurial. In some instances, responsibility is being thrown back on already overburdened families, services and sometimes victims of misfortune or the larger movements in society. Chris Goddard has provide some useful reminders of how some of these processes work in his Not the last word: Point and Counterpoint **Asking for Help When Nobody is listening**. Also included are some useful book reviews, The Australian Welfare State, also Family Obligation and Social Change.

Lloyd Owen