



Editorial

In this final issue for 1992, we decided to look overseas to some interesting developments for children and young people. They are tangible attempts to achieve better outcomes and to give effect to principles of participation and empowerment for children and their families. It is certainly a sign of the present rudimentary state of global human relations that interdependence in the economic sphere allows recessions to spread so readily among the rich nations. None of them yet appear to have answers to growing unemployment its concomitant spread of poverty and class divisions. At the same time, other nations continue to be locked into poverty, too often complicated or caused by military conflict, not infrequently exacerbating vulnerability in the face of natural disasters. We have not succeeded in managing suffering for many and fear for most. At the community and society levels of social organisations, action sometimes fails to recognise the effects on families and households. The result is interference and a failure to support them in performing vital social roles and economic roles as well. Will Schutz over a lifetime of studying interpersonal relations, points to the impact of our individual struggles over the need to be included, the need to have sufficient control over our circumstances and the need for affection. He points to joy as an experience when people in groups help each other to overcome the barriers blocking the satisfaction of these human needs.

Considering this in terms of present rights and heritage for our children surely leads to an imperative that we share knowledge about anything that seems to work; that we seek to test our principles and seek to evaluate the outcomes of policy, legislation and practice.

Australia's close neighbour across the Tasman, New Zealand, has been the site of some fairly radical social and economic experiments. In concert with many other countries, New Zealand also moved in the mid to late 80's, to revise their legislation for the support and control of children and young people and their families. In so doing, they appear to have rediscovered the power of family and extended family, guided by ideas more apparent in indigenous heritage, to do better in managing the needs and behaviour of troubled children and young people. New listening has occurred, important principles introduced and translated into practical action, and evaluation of outcomes is occurring.

Children Australia in this issue, welcomes the contribution of a number of New Zealanders to our appreciation of these developments. Dr Ian Hassell, the Commissioner for Children, has contributed some details of the role of the Commissioner. This position, established under the *Children, Young Persons and their families Act* of 1989, has a central role to oversee law policy and practice as they affect children. Questions related to a Children's Ombudsman, advocacy and independent representation for children, are intermittently on federal and state agendas in Australia.

Perspectives on other aspects of New Zealand's 1989 Act have also been provided, with particular focus given to Family Group Conferences. This unique aspect of the legislation is being hailed as a beneficial process of consensus decision -making in the areas of both juvenile justice and child protection.

Ian Hassell has provided an overview and context for the

provision, including data on its use, since enactment, in relation to both the Family Court and Youth Court. In so doing, he draws attention to the importance of evaluating its on-going effects. In this respect, informative contributions have also been provided by Robert Ludbrook, lawyer and founder of New Zealand's Youth Law project and by Drs Gabrielle Maxwell and Allison Morris. Together the latter two authors have recently completed a major study of the youth justice system in New Zealand.

Reference to overseas approaches and any participation in decision making is also pursued in an article by Paul Ban. Using a permanent care program as his example, Paul explores some of the obstacles to genuine power sharing apparent in practice. Further afield, co-influence for children on their own everyday life is an aim of the Child Citizenship project being conducted in five Danish municipalities. Kirsten Poulsen from the Danish ministry of Social Affairs has reported on some very practical action being taken in Denmark to inform and involve children in the follow up to the ratification of the UN Convention. In

the final contribution in this issue, Dr Jillian Rodd, drawing on some research with mothers of young children, points out that the wellbeing of the child is closely intertwined with that of the parents, and that many parenting programs fail to recognise that if the psychological needs of the parents are not addressed first, then the parents' stress level can prevent them gaining much benefit from the program.

A sense of inclusion, a hand in the control of one's destiny and affection based on respect become a bit more accessible through these developments reported from overseas. They again draw attention to the strengths and opportunities to be found in the primary and secondary groups of people, the families and communities in which children and young people live and to whom they relate. Providing support and resolving concerns at this level, without neglecting our responsibilities and rights as members of the global community, carries some hope of enhancing the life course and life space of the children of today and tomorrow. ♦



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