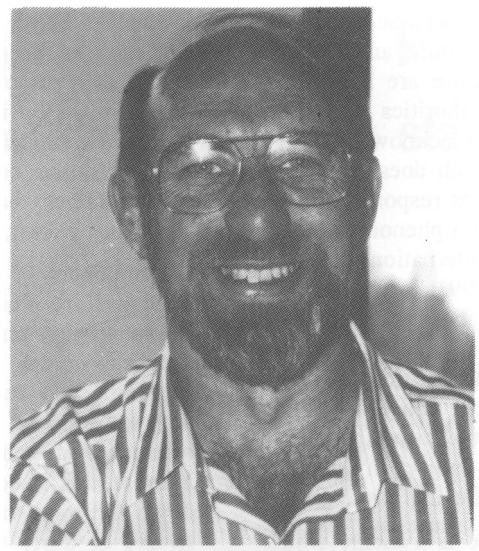


Editorial

Inherent in human nature is a propensity to organise. Our reasons for doing so are many and varied. Beyond companionship and comfort obtained from the proximity of others, are instrumental ends where the extra numbers permit achievements, often of remarkable magnitude. Many factors underlie our behaviour in human groups and organisations, not the least of which is the sense of encouragement and affirmation received when we are acting in concert with valued others, the security derived from belonging or being a valued member or possibly the disapproval or sanctions anticipated or applied if our intentions or actions violate group norms. There is no guarantee, however, that the culture or norms of a group will be directed to good ends, that the needs and rights of the powerless or less powerful will be protected. It is also clear that individually and collectively in our organisations our vision is often clouded, so that we fail to appreciate in the present, the longer term consequences of our own powerful organised behaviour, both action and inaction, and we might fail to see what is going on within the boundaries of other groups and organisations.

Armed with the power of hindsight, we are surprised about what we did not see or how distorted was the image we could see. I recall working on a government committee toward the end of the seventies charged with the task of examining the drug problem in the state, and how tentative were our conclusions about the degree to which the drug trade was organised. In retrospect, the clearest window to the problem appeared to be that of outreach youth workers who spoke of established pyramids, a picture conveyed by victims of these illicit conspiracies to confidants in non authority positions in a climate of relative trust. The message was hard to appreciate, especially in the absence of concrete detail which, of course, had a rough passage on the way to the ears of authority. The necessary, healthy mistrust of anonymity, the wariness of succumbing to over reaction, the need to rely on the lead of those with authority and responsibility, the paucity of research capability, the pressure of time on workers overburdened in fields of activity which have difficulty demonstrating economic productivity or pressing political priority, all combine to cloud perceptions and limit responses. Hindsight revealed starkly the trade and traffic which were, in fact, being built at that time.

In similar vein, there are contemporary concerns here in the early nineties, one large and vexing arena relatively visible, but confusing in its configuration, is the position of young people. The collapse of the youth labour market, slippage in the capacity of post secondary and tertiary educational institutions to match the growth in demand for their services, tightening of social security and social welfare provisions in response to the burden and repeated reference to homelessness, demanding explication and refusing to go away. What is to be the vision for youth in our highly organised society? A few individuals and committees have been working on aspects of these problems, we hear of the Finn Report, the Mayer Report and the Carmichael Report, some State policy frameworks for young people and some legislation coming into force around youth (some of which sounds repressive and frightening). Do any of our readers have comment to make on these issues?

Another contemporary concern, clouded with perceptual difficulty, with which the publications committee of the bureau has been struggling in 1992 has been the subject of satanic ritual child abuse. Some material on this subject has been submitted to the journal for publication which declares the existence of satanic religious practice involving child abuse in Australia. Derived from material

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presented to an agency by clients in the course of counselling, it speaks of abuse extreme in nature and degree. Without any doubt, if events of this nature are happening anywhere, they cannot be tolerated. Authorities consulted however, have not so far been able to acknowledge the availability of evidence of a standard which does lead them to action. The journal is still assessing its responsibility in this matter, but appears to be faced with a phenomena very similar in nature to that reported in the international journal *Child Abuse and Neglect* Vol. 15 No 3 1991. In that publication, a number of articles convey a basis for startling concern and a need for caution in responding to it. Should readers of *Children Australia* have information of substance on satanic abuse or organised ritual abuse the editor would be pleased to hear from you. In the meantime Chris Goddard has made a contribution to the subject in his Point and Counterpoint : Not the Last Word for this issue.

Case Planning in statutory child welfare is a theme which could and should receive much more attention in the literature in Australia. It is part of the daily fare of welfare practitioners and carries massive implications for the children and families who become involved with the many government and non government agencies providing services. At least one state legislature has moved to enshrine case planning in legislation recently and it proposed that some review decisions will be referred to courts. Such decision making must be sensitive and hold paramount the needs and interests of the children. Indeed it must also properly account for the views and opinions of the child and take full account of the views of families and likely sources of constructive outcomes for children. Sharon McCallum from the Northern Territory opens up the subject in this issue with a "how to do it "article on participative case planning, while some aspects of Sonia Russell's article lead one to ponder further about our decision making in some of those more challenging situations.

Jacqueline Hayden from New South Wales puts forward a challenge to the traditional view of child care resting in the family as a responsibility of motherhood with state involvement limited by its form as a residual program. She examines perceptions and progress in relation to child care in the Australian community, finds ambivalence and backsliding rather than change and calls for a revamping of attitudes by men, women and professionals.

A component of the ultimate form of outcome research in child welfare must surely be the long term follow up study. Regrettably it rarely happens. It is gratifying therefore to see Sr. Agatha Rogers, a practitioner with a wealth of experience in residential child care and family support, with an intimate appreciation of the needs of children, turn researcher and embark on just such a process. Her contribution to this issue tells the intriguing story, of her tracking down the most valuable of informants, the former children twenty or thirty years on from their experience in care. It goes some way toward explaining the shortage of studies of this type and we look forward ultimately to hearing the results of the research.

Another very experienced practitioner, clinical psychologist Sonia Russell from Victoria, has responded to a paper on attachment disorders published in the journal last year. She contributes a range of observations about the very difficult area of permanency planning for children perceived to have this type of problem. The nature of these challenges and reluctance of experienced practice oriented workers to publish their perceptions and conclusions, too often, leaves new generations of child welfare workers to work through their own, often painful, processes of discovery, as the child welfare pendulum swings between approaches. We hope that other experienced practitioners will follow this lead and take time to put pen to paper.♦



ADOPTION AUSTRALIA

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Sue Edwards
Introduction by the Hon. Justice Asche
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Published by the National Children's Bureau of Australia Inc. April 1992

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