

SOME DIFFICULTIES IN DEVELOPING A FAMILY — SUPPORT AGENCY

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When Care-Force was first established in Preston in 1976 we had the noble objective of creating a community based family agency providing a range of supportive services to develop and strengthen family functioning and prevent children having to go into institutional care. We aimed to be flexible, respond to family needs as we found them, supplement rather than duplicate any other services available in the community and find new ways of working with family problems.

We feel that in some ways we have been able to carry out some of these objectives, but there have been difficulties and frustrations which have hampered the planning and development of the services we have tried to create.

The major area of difficulty is that of financial resources. Our funding has come from a variety of sources—wherever in fact we could tap funds to establish the programmes we believed the community we were serving needed. We have some funding from Commonwealth Government, some from the State through Family Support Grants and FACS Community Service Grants and some from St John's Homes for Boys and Girls.

One of our real difficulties in planning has been the *uncertainty of funding* — although we have had some grants assured for a three year pilot programme

period, other parts of the programme have had to be established with funds assured for only 12 months.

Annually at the time of submissions for funding under FACS the future of a large part of our service again becomes uncertain. For three whole months staff are uncertain of their future—they are loath to become involved with new families in case the service has to cease—they cannot plan creatively for any future as there is no assured future.

Another problem related to funding has been the *limited programmes eligible* for funding under Family Support Service Grants. D.C.W.S. in Victoria has strongly maintained the policy of restricting their funding to three areas — viz. Family-Aide Programmes, Financial Counselling, and Family Accommodation. These areas are all important, but we have found through experience that a Family Support Agency also needs a counselling/case work service available to provide both assessment and ongoing casework with many of the families using the services.

We have also found that a community child care worker provides invaluable service to families who are having behaviour problems with their children. Yet these essential services do not come within the eligibility of Family Support Grants. We cannot, in fact, develop or experiment with any programmes

outside the three eligible under the Family Support Grants guidelines, unless we can come up with voluntary funding. The planning and direction of our programme is in fact being set by the funding guidelines rather than by the needs of the community we are serving.

St John's Homes has been prepared to pour a large part of its resources and reserves into developing the Care-Force programmes. We have been convinced that what we are doing is really worthwhile, and meeting family needs. But no voluntary agency can continue to meet the costs of expensive labour intensive services which bring in no income.

There must be an answer. If the community needs these services, government must provide adequate funding in a way which gives security to the agency so that it can plan creatively. The agency must, of course, be responsible to the community it is serving and the funding body. But the current situation is far from satisfactory. So much time and energy of valuable administrators is being spent unnecessarily in preparing submissions, hounding government departments, planning and seeking alternative finances. This is waste. Likewise, staff in agencies are being put through traumatic and anxious periods of uncertainty which must inhibit their work with families.