



Editorial

With this issue comes the end of the eighties. Many will be reflecting on the successes, the failures and the features of that decade. Many also will be looking forward and wondering what the nineties will bring.

Clear answers to many of the big questions remain elusive. At the end of the entrepreneurial eighties, do we have more or less social justice, more or less poverty locally, nationally, globally? Do we have a safer environment for the nurture, maturation and development of our children than before? Are our young people better equipped to face future uncertainties than their forebears? How much future is there for our children to face?

In the view of this observer, the eighties will eventually be recalled as a time when politico — legal solutions and commercial solutions were vigorously sought for many social questions, in a constrained (albeit deregulated) economic environment. Powerful social and economic influences and sanctions have been introduced by legislators, judiciary, financial institutions, commercial enterprises and media owners and operators. Significant shifts have occurred in the interpretation of major ideologies and in their application to society. In welfare the pendulum has swung from universalism to residual and categorical provision and the principle of 'user pays' has gained credence and status.

On the positive side one can see some greater accountability and potential responsibility for the exploitation and use of certain resources. On the negative side families with children are often needy users with limited capacity to pay. It has also been clear that we continue to live in a world which is not free of pestilence, war, famine and other calamities of human or natural origin. There is as much need now as ever before for human beings to come to the aid of each other.

In the 1990s what will be on the intellectual, social and emotional agenda of our enclaves and leaders in public and private sectors? Clearly a concern for the physical environment has emerged, with its capacity to sustain life at all, apart from some measure of quality. Personal and public debt and poverty cannot escape consideration, particularly for families in respect to food, clothing and shelter. Intergroup relations between factions, nations and cultures must be more productively addressed.

For our part, *Australian Child and Family Welfare* is aiming to produce a special issue in 1990 on the State of Australia's Children. Contributions from researchers, practitioners and opinion leaders in a number of fields are being sought.

For the present, in this issue some roles and conditions for parents come to the fore. Parents are inevitably important players in the nurture, socialisation and protection of children. Questions arise frequently

concerning instances of capability, equipment and empowerment being equal to the tasks. There are clearly some instances in which children have to be protected from their parents but it remains equally evident that the well being of children is closely bound to the well being of the family unit (whatever its form) into which children are born and in which they grow.

The first two articles in this issue draw attention to the importance of giving weight to parental problems, perceptions and positive roles when intervention is taking place. The research of Jan Mason and her students from McArthur Institute should remind those of us engaged in statutory child protection that we can appear ugly, uncaring, punitive and adversarial to people at times when they are down and most vulnerable. Do we want it this way and to what extent is it inevitable, necessary or productive? The second article by Wendy O'Brien points the way to some answers to that question. It points to the possibility of productive partnerships between agency and parents in developing a protocol which aims to include, inform and empower parents without compromising child safety. Parent education has moved up on the community agenda in recent years and Jillian Rodd and Annette Holland have provided a useful exploration of the range of approaches which have emerged in Victoria.

In another direction, parent roles, vis a vis roles of courts and others in legal and medical circles, are raised again for debate in a further report by Frank Bates on court decisions permitting surgical sterilisation of two young women with severe intellectual disability. Beyond the roles lie some fundamental community issues around its responses to disability. Will the 1990s find us returning to the moral debates of the late 19th century about eugenics and euthanasia which contributed to the segregation and institutionalisation of large numbers of disadvantaged and disabled people (Hollander 1989, Wolfensberger 1989)*.

The discomfort inherent in reflections such as this is exacerbated by Chris Goddard's column in this issue. He draws attention to some contributions from science fiction. As we leave 1984 behind and face the **Brave New World** and the **Sea and the Summer**, there is a strong need for diligence in the pursuit of "win/win" solutions to the challenges of the nineties.

Lew Hess draws attention to something of that spirit in his review of Rod Plant's book on Burusides' Khmer unaccompanied minors resettlement programme.

LLOYD OWEN

* Hollander, R., *Mental Retardation* Vol 27(2), 1989, pp 53-61
Wolfensberger, W., *Mental Retardation* Vol 27(2), 1989, pp 63-65

Editor's Note

Our apology is due for an omission from Vol 14, No. 3. The article Family Support — The First Option for Families in Great Stress pp 3-6 had two authors. Anne Giljohann worked in the Careforce programme as family caseworker and family aide coordinator for three years and collaborated with Margaret Matters in the production of the article.