

Letter to the Editor

“Errant Editorial”

I am an Officer of the Department of Youth and Community Services in New South Wales and I presently occupy the position of Resident District Officer at Gosford, but I write this as a private individual with approximately thirty years of experience in the various aspects of social welfare and child care covered by the Department.

Mr Smith in his editorial has made some excellent points, but I feel that he errs badly in his last sentence, in which he states “Government Departments and traditional voluntary agencies with few exceptions have shown that they are unresponsive, unmotivated and uninvolved”. I do not believe that such generalisations, which are unfortunately all too common these days, do anything to espouse the cause of better child welfare and social welfare programmes. It may well be that Mr Smith would suggest that the Department for which I work is perhaps one of the “few exceptions”, but he certainly doesn't make that point in his article. I can say, however, and would be quite happy to debate the point, that this particular Government Department has at least in the last decade been most responsive to all sections of the Community's suggestions.

Being involved in so many community affairs and sitting on Committees, Boards of Management, Case Discussion Groups and being subjected to repeated questions at public meetings, I find too often that critics are themselves quite uninformed of modern developments within Government Departments. I do not intend in the short space of this letter to even endeavour to list the innovations

and developmental programmes which have been introduced in this State, but I would suggest that Ray Jenkins report in the December issue, gives at least one illustration that the initiative in programmes often lies with the Department's Officers.

This is not meant to be an apologia for this Department as a whole nor for the “Private Agencies” mentioned in the editorial, although I feel that they too are unjustly dealt with for my certain knowledge is that some are acting, or have acted albeit slowly and somewhat cautiously to revamp their services, although there are obviously traditional pockets of resistance to any change. The real reason for reacting to these sweeping criticisms, is that I feel they do nothing constructive, but are often the source of discouragement to Officers and workers who are conscientious and progressive. In the vast majority of cases closer scrutiny of general criticisms' indicates that the critic is often either grossly misinformed, or else he is saying things that he simply believes to be true without any basis of research whatsoever.

I firmly believe that we who work in the field of social welfare should avoid being caught up in the modern and hopefully passing trend of criticising the Establishment simply because it is the Establishment. I believe that we can derive far greater benefits for ourselves and our clients if we seek out and highlight those positive attainments and advances, even to the extent of giving credit to what is euphemistically called “The Government” with

which obviously none of us can ever feel totally happy. Such an approach would certainly be far more professional and positive in its goals if somewhat less sensational in its initial impact.

In conclusion, I would suggest that as your Journal has placed its editorial imprimatur on Mr Smith's comments it could profit its readers by contacting my Department's Community Liaison Bureau, who would only be too happy to give information on the programmes at present being attempted or proposed by this Department. I say this in all sincerity because I feel quite justifiably proud in working in this Department, which for many years was acknowledged as a world leader in Child Welfare Legislation, but under the guidance of its present Director certainly has not rested on its laurels, but has sought and is still seeking to attempt to implement the best of every constructive suggestion, which is offered.

There remains of course, one restricting factor common to all agencies and communities, which can mean the death knell to even the finest of plans and that is finance or the alleged lack of it. And in this I refer to you to the prime example of our now sadly declining Australian Assistance Plan, which can quite properly be cited as a positive and valid example of your editorial criticisms of a Government which appears outwardly at least to be unresponsive etc. The imminent demise of the A.A.P. just as certainly does not provide an example of the rather high flying sentiments expressed by Mr Saltmarsh in the same edition of your Journal.

J. K. Hawse
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FRASER'S NEW FEDERALISM



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