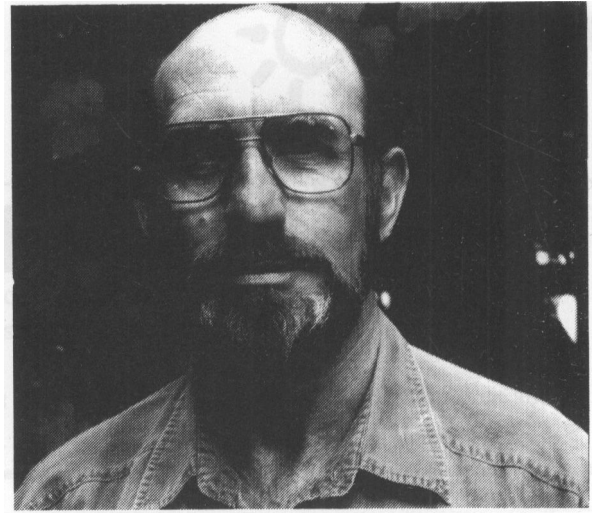


Editorial



Lloyd Owen

This issue carries an obituary for Len Tierney, who died in April and whose loss to the child and family welfare field in Australia and internationally is keenly felt. His unwavering commitment to neglected and deprived children and excluded families was outstanding, challenging and inspiring. His dogged pursuit of better understanding and better practice was visionary and pragmatic - both qualities required to pursue the theme of the international year, poverty.

Poverty alleviation is a slightly more comforting term than poverty eradication at a time when great uncertainty still reigns about our vision of the future and while our understanding of the phenomena of poverty is disparate. While we search for greater definition of both ends and means in the global economic future, there are some objectives which are quite clear and some situations which should clearly be labelled intolerable. No one should starve to death, no child should live in a state of hunger, no food source should be exploited beyond sustainable limits or polluted by human act or omission.

The many countries in the so called third world which have had to attend to challenges of absolute poverty now have knowledge and experience to share in the field of poverty alleviation. Such sharing is important for the members of the other two worlds, the capitalist economies, which are plagued by growing inequities of resource distribution and fear of developing underclass, and the socialist command economies, which are having trouble coping with the social and, for many, the economic consequences of moving to market economies. In general terms, it is apparent that success involves the mobilisation of individual and collective effort at the local level, and that this will at times require resource inputs from outside and a socio-economic environment which is conducive to the local effort without creating unnecessary dependencies and draining away the resources which need to be reinvested in local activity. Much has been said in recent times about aid and investment policies which are primarily directed in their effect to extracting resources for the further benefit of the rich at the expense of the poor. There is I suspect an important place in this hard-headed, so-called structurally-adjusting world for some principled investment and benevolence. Greed for wealth and power too often appears to provide the motivation at local, national, regional and international levels.

There is now a plethora of international instruments which set some useful standards for human behaviour, rights and obligations. They include the UN Convention on the Rights of

the Child and the UN Declaration on the Right to Development. Obligations under them, however, are largely connected to actions of national governments, many of which claim to be too cash-strapped for the extension and sometimes maintenance of health, education and welfare services. They are often crippled by debt and missing revenue with the high speed global movement of resources. Much of this movement occurs in private sectors and is often disconnected from views or obligations about longer-term social inequities. In turn inequities become enmeshed with escalating cycles of political and military activity. Too often this seems to exacerbate the problem, introducing a greater range of horrors. A Cambodian survivor of the Pol Pot period recently drew my attention to the fundamental importance of addressing hunger where it exists and human dignity. The use of wealth and power in ways which deprive people of food and means to maintain their self-esteem is a misuse of wealth and power.

It has become a matter of even greater importance at this time in history for stronger links to be forged between economic and social and environmental goals. Failure to do so seems to me to place both survival and the civil society at risk. Within all this there is a constant need to openly discuss and debate our values, to balance the pros and cons of our ideas and our fashions and to find and draw the bottom-lines appropriate to our time and circumstances. James Midgley, in his book *Social development: the developmental perspective in social welfare* (reviewed in *Children Australia* Vol 21, No 1), argues the need for economic and social development to be drawn together and, in recognition of the diversity of interests involved in contemporary society, points to the significance of the role of governments in what he terms 'managed pluralism'. There are rights and freedoms to safeguard, and there are basic human conditions to be identified and met.

In this issue of *Children Australia* there are a batch of articles which take us into some of those difficult debates about how to achieve a civil society (characterised, as Eva Cox so recently put it in the 1995 Boyer lectures, as building social capital) - a society built on trust and reciprocity but open to the dissent and debate necessary for our ideas to be worked out in safer ways to form sounder values. Our myths and stereotypes need to be exposed and subjected to the reports of those affected by them in a climate of participation, good will and careful inquiry. The articles pick up issues which lack definition but generate strong

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The School of Social Work at the University of Melbourne, where Len undertook his initial Bachelor of Arts and Diploma of Social Studies (1948), was his professional base from the early 1960s, after several years of study and visiting scholarship in the U.S.A. and the U.K. He became Reader-in-Charge in 1964, continuing in this position until the mid-1970s and thereafter acting as head of Department for protracted periods on several occasions until his retirement in 1991, when he continued to maintain an active presence as a senior research associate. As Head, Len linked staff and students with leading international schools and scholars, encouraging international travel, exchange and joint scholarship. While he was often heard to say one should 'stick to the knitting' in choosing a research focus, he was open to the possibility of many patterns. Len's contribution to social work education was long-sighted and diverse. He taught in many subjects of the Diploma and then Bachelor of Social Work, spanning policy, administration, research and practice in casework and in community development. His special love was a child and family elective subject, that provided a firm foundation for many new graduates entering the child welfare field.

Len pioneered post-graduate social work education in Australia, and in 1976 he was foundation chairman to the graduate studies program at the Melbourne University social work department. He insisted that theories of the family and theories of organisation be included as crucial building blocks for advanced practitioners. His many post-graduate students, now themselves social work educators, administrators, researchers and senior practitioners,

remember with gratitude his endless encouragement and patience along with incisive criticism. He also gave access to the resources of his own wide reading and experience and his extensive library, built on his love of history, philosophy and literature, as well as social work. He stimulated his students with his capacity to appreciate the minute details of the day to day rhythms of a child and family, while also seeing the broad context of the society and the times in which we live. They will not forget the tension of the thoughtful silence, or the rather wicked glint his eye as he challenged the would-be pundit to produce evidence, think more deeply, or follow up a lateral line of enquiry. For Len, scholarship about troubled children and their families was too important for woolly thinking.

In the last three years, in the face of debilitating illnesses, Len fought to maintain his family, social and intellectual life. As always, his tenacity was formidable, his wit ready, his memory astounding, and his commitment to social work and child welfare intact. Only days before his death, he left hospital to participate in the graduation ceremony of two of his Ph.D. students of child welfare. The field has lost a great friend and mentor.

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emotions – sexuality, sexual abuse, family form and function, the chronic illness of children. Broadly, they go to the edge and beyond our comfort zones. They open up questions in areas in which we would prefer to feel settled.

Wendy Patton and Mary Mannison report on a study in which tertiary students were asked about unwanted sexual experiences which occurred while they were under thirteen years of age. Their study design extends the range of behaviours under examination with a view to exploring the notion of a continuum of sexual experiences which may be unwanted and which may have a longer-term impact. In spite of the prominence of sex and sexuality in the popular press, well-supported and considered viewpoints about the effects of events on psycho-sexual development still appear to be needed. Approaches to responding to the offender have only recently begun to be addressed in this country in a programmatic way in correctional systems.

Karen Flanagan and Janet Patterson have been engaged for some time now with a program for adolescent sex offenders operating through the Children's Protection Society in Victoria. In an article for this issue they share some insights on sibling incest.

Cas O'Neill, Julie Contole, Robyne Schwartz, Doug Bryan and Christine Minogue focus in their article on a significant institutional shortcoming which could easily become a greater problem as health systems move to streamline throughput.

Chronic illness and disability in children challenge health systems which like to get people better and which are geared to the acute. Their exploration of the literature points to risks and gaps which care providers need to recognise and address when working with each other, the child and the family in partnerships to deal with the long haul.

Karen Healy and contributors from the support group, Young Mothers for Young Women, challenge stereotypical views of coping capacity and outcomes of early motherhood. Their article raises both pragmatics and principles for supporting caregiving roles in our community.

The need for discussion and careful examination of attitudes which can be woven into political processes also emerges in the article by Philip Mendes. Hopefully the ideas which translate to policy and practice will be those resting on the best available evidence.

Additional items in this issue of *Children Australia* include some notes for guidance in the territory of avoiding paedophilia in the child care field and reviews of two books which present survivor perspectives of child sexual abuse. Chris Goddard provides some experience and his views of print media activity and child abuse.

Lloyd Owen