

From minimal intervention to minimal support

Child protection services under the neo-liberal Kennett Government in Victoria 1992-1999

Philip Mendes

This article examines the politics and ideology of Victorian child protection services during the Kennett years. The argument advanced is that the Kennett Liberal/National Party Coalition Government viewed child abuse in narrow, individualistic terms. In contrast to the previous Labor Government, which emphasized a philosophy of minimal intervention based on a partnership of family, community and the state, the Kennett philosophy was one of minimal support. The key emphasis was on the reporting of child abuse to statutory child protection authorities, and the treatment and punishment of individual offenders. Spending on broader structural prevention and support services which actually help the victims of abuse was not a priority.

A number of examples of this neo-liberal agenda are given, including the poorly timed introduction of mandatory reporting and the associated diversion of resources from support services to investigation; the early cuts to accommodation and non-government support services; the inadequate response to demonstrated links between child abuse and poverty; the censorship of internal and external critics; and the appalling handling of the strike by child protection workers. Attention is focused primarily on the broader macro-political debates, rather than specific micro-service delivery issues.

Many thanks to Associate Professor Chris Goddard for his helpful comments on an earlier draft, and to Gail Winkworth from the ACT Child Abuse Prevention and Education Unit for

Dr Philip Mendes is a lecturer in the Department of Social Work at Monash University, Melbourne, Vic. Email: Philip.Mendes@arts.monash.edu.au
provision of relevant documents.

Historically, the Victorian child protection system has been characterised by a philosophy of minimum intervention. This philosophy holds that statutory authorities should intervene in families only when children are exposed to significant harm that cannot be addressed by existing family and community supports (Carney, 1984, pp.286-287; Carney, 1989, p.33; VFCS, 1992, p.3).

In practice, this philosophy was assisted by a balanced funding of both statutory child protection and non-government child welfare services which recognized their mutual inter-dependence (Scott, 1995, p.85). However, the Liberal/National Party Coalition Government led by Premier Jeff Kennett overturned this arrangement by prioritizing statutory child protection services at the expense of broader non-government child and family welfare supports. Under such an approach, children and families involved with protective services would only receive minimal support once they had been processed by the reporting and investigation stages of the statutory system.

PART ONE

THE IDEOLOGY OF THE KENNETT LIBERAL GOVERNMENT

The ideology of the Kennett Liberal Government was that of the neo-liberal/economic rationalist Right – small government, privatisation, and cuts to the public sector in order to free up the market place (Crooks & Webber, 1993, pp.27-39; Salvaris, 1995, pp.156-157; Ernst & Webber, 1996, pp.122-126).

The government's vision was strongly influenced by the leading right-wing 'think

tanks', the Institute of Public Affairs (IPA) and the Tasman Institute, known for their vigorous hostility to the welfare state and welfare spending (Kohler, 1997; Bessant, 1999, p.5; Hayward, 1999, pp.140-142).

This ideological influence extended directly into government appointments (Russell, 1999, p.56). For example, the Minister for Community Services, Dr Dennis Napthine, appointed as an adviser former IPA apparatchik, Dr Ken Baker, a long-time critic of social justice and government welfare programs (Baker, 1996a; 1996b).

PUBLIC CHOICE THEORY AND SERVICE DELIVERY

The government's delivery of human services was strongly influenced by public choice theory, an economic methodology which argues that all individuals, whether in the public sector or the private sector, act in their own self-interest. Politicians seek to gain support, for example, by satisfying the demands of organizational pressure groups at the expense of the common interest. The only constraint on this pursuit of self-interest is the market, which constrains the pursuit of the interests of pressure groups for the benefit of the consumer.

Consequently, public choice theorists favour private rather than public provision of goods whenever possible. They believe in a slimmer, allegedly impartial state which will be unconstrained by the demands of obstructive interest groups. Arguments for efficiency should take precedence over alternative concepts such as equality of opportunity and social cohesion (Self, 1993, pp.59-61).

Public choice theorists are particularly critical of welfare spending and welfare

lobbies. They argue that the welfare state and its services operate in the interest of the well-paid bureaucrats and social workers (the so-called 'New Class') who administer them rather than in the interest of the disadvantaged consumers whom they are intended to serve. These producers of the welfare services, it is argued, have a vested interest in maintaining and expanding welfare services that has little to do with alleviating poverty and far more to do with enriching themselves (Brennan, 1998, p.133).

THE KENNETT PUBLIC SECTOR MODEL

In line with public choice theory, some of the key features of the Kennett Government's public sector model included:

1) The notion of governments steering (making policy decisions), but not rowing (direct service delivery) as popularized by the American writers David Osborne and Ted Gaebler (1993) in their book *Reinventing Government*. According to Osborne and Gaebler, governments should not directly deliver services, but rather should contract private providers to do so in the most effective and efficient manner. *Reinventing Government* explicitly reflects public choice assumptions about the role, scope, and proper working of government including the importance of minimising government bureaucracy (Alford et al, 1994, pp.13-15; Brennan, 1998, pp.129-130).

Thus, the Kennett Government insisted on the introduction of Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) in place of submission-based funding (Blacher, 1997). This was despite evidence that CCT erodes partnerships and cooperation in the planning and delivery of community services, reduces flexibility in the provision of services, adversely impacts continuity of care, and restricts community development and advocacy activities (Atkins & McCaughey, 1999, p.31; CWAV, 1999, p.6).

In addition, the government stated it would strongly consider the contracting out of case management of children and young people on statutory protective orders to the non-government sector (DHS, 1997, pp.viii & 15). However, concerns were expressed that this proposal, when coupled with confidentiality requirements (discussed in Part Four below), would hinder adequate monitoring of the

effectiveness of the statutory system (Pegler, 1997).

2) The associated purchaser/provider split based on funding designated outputs or outcomes rather than labour or service operating inputs which aims to prevent the capture of government decision-making and resources by producer and beneficiary interest groups (Alford et al, 1994, p.17; Brennan, 1998, p.133).

Thus, the Kennett Government insisted on the introduction of output-based funding 'based on the needs of clients not the maintenance of agencies which provide these services' (Blacher, 1996, p.11; Blacher, 1997, p.35). A common concern with this practice is that the purchaser/provider split is used to restrict community agencies to contracted service provision, and so exclude or at least hamper activities involving advocacy or policy development (Brennan, 1998, p.131).

The incoming Kennett Government viewed social spending as having a particularly low priority, and specifically targeted health and welfare services for a disproportionate share of funding cuts.

3) The empowering of welfare consumers – however disadvantaged or disabled or isolated – as self-interested individuals whose freedom of choice is to be maximised by output-based service delivery (Alford et al, 1994, p.4; Brennan, 1998, p.136). Consumer choices are to be judged by market research surveys and opinion polls, rather than by representative collective structures or consultations which may pose an unacceptable challenge to government policy agendas (Ernst & Webber, 1996, p.132).

Thus, the Kennett Government suggested the introduction of consumer satisfaction surveys as a means of 'enhancing client and community input into agency operations' (Blacher, 1997, p.45). A potential consequence of such proposals is

that the identification of needs and the creation of solutions is left entirely to government. Disadvantaged groups will find themselves politically marginalised, and denied access to government bureaucrats and Ministers (Melville, 1998, p.19).

SOCIAL EXPENDITURE AND NEO-LIBERALISM

The national recession of the early 1990s combined with local disasters such as the Pyramid Building Society collapse to create a fiscal crisis in Victoria. Although the Cain and Kirner Labor Governments sought to maintain generous levels of social expenditure, they were forced by declining government revenue and increased state debt to reduce public spending (Wiseman, 1992).

The incoming Kennett Government viewed social spending as having a particularly low priority, and specifically targeted health and welfare services for a disproportionate share of funding cuts. The first Kennett mini-Budget in December 1992 announced cuts of \$240 million to health, community services and education. This amounted to 54 per cent of budget savings despite the fact that health and community services constituted only 27 per cent of state expenditure. Cuts to peak welfare, consultative and advisory bodies, and information and advocacy programs were particularly severe (Inglis, 1994, p.69; Hudson & Wiseman, 1995, p.187).

In the five years from 1993/94 to 1997/98, Victoria's real spending on total social and community services fell by 10.7 per cent – an average of \$281 per head of population. This included a drop of 20 per cent in welfare expenditure (Hancock & Cowling, 1999). Overall, Victoria had the lowest social spending of any state (Sheil, 1999, pp.13-14).

As we will see in Part Two, protective services were also cut despite considerable government rhetoric to the contrary.

PART TWO

MANDATORY REPORTING AND THE DIVERSION OF RESOURCES FROM SUPPORT TO INVESTIGATION

Mandatory reporting refers to the statutory requirement for certain groups of professionals to notify a prescribed statutory authority if they have reasonable

grounds to suspect that a child has been physically or sexually abused.

The debate about the merits of mandatory reporting is highly contentious, and is generally influenced by different philosophical approaches to the question of child abuse. The arguments for and against mandatory reporting are adequately summarized elsewhere (Aldous, 1994, pp.24-25; Mendes, 1997, p.179; Johnstone, 1999, pp.149-157), and will not be revisited in any detail here. However, in my opinion, there are two fundamental issues which are central to the debate.

The first issue, which often does not receive adequate consideration by opponents of mandatory reporting, is that abused and neglected children – whatever their socio-economic background – constitute the most vulnerable and disadvantaged group in society. On any reasonable assessment of competing claims for social justice, they are entitled to priority support and protection from the state.

The second associated issue which is often ignored by proponents of mandatory reporting is that too often mandatory reporting has led in practice to a diversion of resources from support and prevention services for abused children and their families, to narrow statutory investigation services. In particular, emphasis is placed on the removal of children as the sole solution to the problem, rather than addressing associated factors such as poverty, unemployment, substance abuse, mental illness and homelessness.

Unless this resource issue is directly addressed by government policy, it can potentially create a situation in which mandatory reporting produces less, rather than more, effective protection of abused and neglected children (Carter et al, 1988, p.52; Garbutt, 1993, pp.52-53; Hough, 1995, pp.174-175; Lindsey, 1994; VCOSS, 1993, p.21; Hancock, 1994; Raysmith, 1994, p.21; Lawrence-Karski, 1997, pp.31-33).

In Victoria, the Kennett Government initially opposed mandatory reporting due to the belief that protective services could not handle the increased workload that would occur. In short, the government was not philosophically opposed to mandatory reporting, but did not wish to spend the extra money required to cope with mandatory reporting.

However, intense media pressure associated with the trial of Daniel Valerio's stepfather forced the government to change its mind. In March 1993, the Minister Michael John announced that the government would introduce mandatory reporting in order to lift Victoria's relatively low reporting rates of child abuse compared to other States (Goddard & Liddell, 1995).

The Minister's decision presented the government with a political predicament. On the one hand, mandatory reporting sat comfortably with the government's ideological perspective since it emphasized the investigation and punishment of individual perpetrators of abuse. However, on the other hand, the government did not welcome a system of mandatory reporting which provoked concerns about a large and growing number of dysfunctional families, rather than restricting demands on government resources to a small number of severe cases.

... too often mandatory reporting has led in practice to a diversion of resources from support and prevention services for abused children and their families, to narrow statutory investigation services.

Yet, this is exactly what happened. Reports of child abuse in Victoria increased by an estimated 63 per cent – up from 19,000 reports annually to about 31,000. Whilst the increase in reports was not solely due to mandatory reporting, and was also influenced by media reports of Daniel Valerio and other abused children (Goddard, 1996, p.103), there is little doubt that mandatory reporting succeeded in producing a greater public awareness of child protection issues.

Given its ideological predilections, the Kennett Government was highly unlikely to address the above stated concern about diversion of resources from support to investigation. In practice, the government had in fact already elected to erode broader

support and prevention services. Whilst the government persistently claimed that child protection services were exempted from budget cuts (Naphine, 1997), in fact only the statutory investigation services were protected.

Specific cuts to child protection services totalled \$7.4 million, to be saved by replacing high cost residential services such as family group homes which were operated by full-time professional child carers, with lower cost home-based services such as foster care. Cuts to non-government organisations totalled \$3.1 million, and to government facilities \$4.3 million (Bursian, 1995, p.5).

As noted by the Auditor-General, this decision involved a reduction in system capacity of around 185 placements. Yet, the increased notifications arising from mandatory reporting necessitated demands for an extra 855 placements, including the previously identified reduction of 185 placements (Auditor-General, 1996, p.120).

In his 1993 report on protective services in Victoria, Justice Fogarty argued with considerable foresight that if the budget cuts accompanied the introduction of mandatory reporting, this was

...likely to mean that more children and families will be drawn into the protection system, but there will be less capacity to treat those children and families in an effective way. Thus, the protective service will take on the appearance of doing more whereas in reality it will be achieving less (Fogarty, 1993, p.27).

Subsequent reports would confirm that this policy had created an alarming shortage of appropriate placements for children considered at serious risk of abuse (Bayliss & Carter, 1994; Auditor-General, 1996, p.107). However, the government's response was to reiterate that its ideological commitment to smaller government would take precedence over demonstrated social needs. According to Premier Kennett, Victoria faced a financial crisis of unprecedented proportions:

*Unless and until we can reduce debt and interest bills, our ability to deal with a whole range of other issues is very much restricted (quoted in *The Age*, 20/9/93).*

A later paper by Yehudi Blacher, Director, Youth and Family Services, emphasized that the public sector would face 'continuing and relentless pressure to do

more with less in terms of service delivery'. Blacher suggested that calls for greater funding of child welfare services would 'fall on deaf ears' (Blacher, 1996).

It was only in response to extreme media pressure (Mendes, 1994, pp.18-19) that the government agreed to increase the number of child protection workers. By March 1996, a total of 663 child protection officers – an increase of approximately 150 – were employed in Victoria at an additional cost of \$19.3 million (*Momentum*, March 1996, p.1). This increased spending on statutory investigation services sat comfortably with the government's ideological concern to identify and punish individual offenders.

However, on the question of funding for structural prevention and support services which actually help the victims and potential perpetrators of abuse, the government made no concessions whatsoever. Despite the huge increase in the number of children being detected as a result of mandatory reporting, no extra funding was provided to prevention and treatment programs such as school support centres, maternal and child health nurses, family aides, and specialist counsellors.

According to the Children's Welfare Association of Victoria, funding for family support services remained at the 1988 level of \$10 million – meeting only 55 per cent of operating and overhead costs (Were, 1994; Bursian, 1995, p.5; CWAV, 1997). Prominent academic Dorothy Scott used the analogy of having a health system in which ambulances and casualty departments (child protection workers and courts) were expanded, while immunisation programs (prevention) and surgical wards (support and counselling) were closed (Scott, 1995, p.85).

Despite repeated requests from non-government agencies, the Kennett Government refused to address this demonstrated imbalance between funding of statutory investigations, and funding of support services. A direct consequence was that many children experienced 'systems abuse' – that is, preventable harm as an indirect result of policies or programs designed to provide care and protection – once they entered the child protection system (Fredman & Green, 1994; Auditor-General, 1996, p.129).

It is perhaps worth noting in contrast that the ACT introduced mandatory reporting

of child abuse in June 1997 without any of the detrimental outcomes discussed above. The ACT appears to have learnt from the Victorian experience, and specifically rejected ideologically driven policies that would lead to the prioritising of investigative and statutory services over programs that support and strengthen families (Winkworth, 1997; Prideaux, 1999).

Despite the huge increase in the number of children being detected as a result of mandatory reporting, no extra funding was provided to prevention and treatment programs such as school support centres, maternal and child health nurses, family aides, and specialist counsellors.

OTHER CONCERNS ABOUT MANDATORY REPORTING

Whilst the diversion of resources from support and prevention services to policing and investigation was the major negative outcome of mandatory reporting, other concerns were also present.

For example, the relevant legislation still only applies to doctors, nurses, police, and teachers. A number of important professional groups, including social workers, youth workers, welfare workers, and youth and child care officers, have not been legally mandated to report abuse. The Kennett Government originally stated that all groups would be mandated by the end of 1994. The only reason for this delay would appear to be that the government was unwilling to fund services to address the further increase in reports that may have arisen (Easterbrook, 1994).

An associated concern is that research suggests a significant number of doctors – at least 20 per cent – still fail to report abuse due to a lack of training and education regarding child abuse and mandatory reporting (Holland, 1998; Holland, 1999). Although I am personally

sceptical as to the causes of this problem given that the AMA has long been opposed to mandatory reporting (Chandler, 1993; Fogarty, 1993, pp.121-122), it is concerning that the government failed to take any action to address this problem.

A final concern is that the section of the legislation pertaining to criminal sanctions for those failing to notify appears to be ineffective. This has long been a problem with mandatory reporting laws, and prosecutions tend to be rare (Johnstone, 1999, pp.159-163). The only prosecution in Victoria for failing to report abuse – that of a primary school principal in December 1997 – was spectacularly unsuccessful (Goddard & Tucci, 1997; Swain, 1998; Johnstone, 1999, pp.163-164). Again, it is debatable as to how seriously the government took the efficacy of its own legislation.

PART THREE

CHILD ABUSE AND POVERTY

There is increasing evidence that child abuse and particularly neglect are linked to broader structural inequities such as poverty, unemployment, and homelessness (Young, Baker & Monnone, 1989; Auditor-General, 1996, p.25; Fernandez, 1996, pp.84-88 & 244-248; Prent & Lewis, 1996; Thorpe, 1997, pp.69-72; Fernandez, 1998; Hood, 1998; Choi et al, 1999, pp.281-282; Scott, 1999; Vinson, 1999, pp.12-13).

To be sure, this association is complex, and reflects in part the greater vulnerability of the poor to patterns of social surveillance. Nevertheless, even when the disproportionate reporting of the poor to state authorities is taken into account, there is still an overwhelming link between poverty and child abuse (McMahon, 1998, pp.16-17; Mendes, 1999, p.28).

The association between poverty and child abuse arguably has two implications for child protection services in Victoria. The first implication is that many of the neglect cases referred to statutory protective services may be more appropriately addressed by non-government family support services and other structural assistance. The second implication is that even where child abuse and neglect cases require statutory intervention, there may still be an important role for structural supports to either relieve the need for

removal of a child, or alternatively to assist reunification.

The Kennett Government consistently struggled with these two implications given its ideological assumption that child abuse was principally an individualistic problem to be dealt with through legal intervention. As we have already noted, no extra funding was provided to non-government support and prevention programs to cope with the large number of extra families referred as a result of mandatory reporting. Many of these programs were left with little choice but to re-notify families to protective services in order to facilitate their access to priority supports and resources (Auditor-General, 1996, p.47; Mendes, 1996, pp.30-31).

Nor was any consideration given to the establishment of a new child welfare or family support sub-division within child protection services dealing solely with issues of welfare support and assistance to children and families. Protective workers were left to play a double and contradictory role: one of control in terms of initiating statutory intervention and court orders, and one of care in terms of facilitating support and assistance to these same families.

This is not to say that the Kennett Government failed to recognize the existence of the problem. A number of government statements and reports, for example, acknowledged that many of the families referred to protective services required structural supports, rather than statutory intervention (Armytage, 1994; Clark, 1995, p.23; DHS, 1997a, pp.5-6 & 10). It also needs to be acknowledged that state governments have minimal power compared to the Commonwealth to influence overall income and wealth distribution.

Yet the Victorian Government's capacity to tackle the problem was necessarily limited by its narrow neo-liberal, cost-cutting agenda. No consideration was given, for example, to creating adequately funded universalistic programs that would genuinely address family problems related to structural inequities. Instead, the Kennett Government seemed principally concerned with creating specific structures that would reduce demand on the over-worked protective service program.

This would appear to be the principal aim of the Strengthened Family Support and Preventive Measures program which is

designed to 'provide an alternative preventative service response to needy families, and thereby reduce referrals to Protective Services' (DHS, 1997b). Given that this program is currently under evaluation, it is perhaps too early to tell whether it will remain a narrow diversionary service, or alternatively whether it can potentially expand to effectively address wider issues of family poverty and disadvantage.

Regardless, the Kennett Government's overall response to the demonstrated link between child abuse and poverty can best be summarized as an attempt to divert problems of chronic family poverty and neglect to an under-funded non-government sector. This is a solution which arguably may lead to the development of more serious familial problems, or child maltreatment, in the long term (Tomison, 1996, p.2).

... the Kennett Government's overall response to the demonstrated link between child abuse and poverty can best be summarized as an attempt to divert problems of chronic family poverty and neglect to an under-funded non-government sector.

PART FOUR

POLICY CENSORSHIP: THE MARGINALISATION OF CHILD PROTECTION INTEREST GROUPS

Reflecting the influence of public choice theory, the Kennett Government sought to marginalise and censor potential critics of its policies. For example, the government abolished or silenced a number of independent public authorities such as the Auditor General, the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Victorian Law Reform Commission, and the Equal Opportunity Commissioner. In addition, public servants were gagged, and freedom of information laws amended to reduce

access (Salvaris, 1995, pp.148-150; Bessant, 1999, p.9; Hancock, 1999, p.40).

Within the child protection arena, this attempted censorship of critics took three principal forms. Firstly, the government abolished existing formal consultation bodies such as the Victorian Family and Children's Services Council (John, 1992). Despite repeated requests from peak provider groups and others (Fogarty, 1993, p.135; Mitchell, 1996, p.71; CWAV, 1997; CWAV, 1998, p.4; VCOSS, 1998, pp.8 & 15), the government refused to introduce new external and public accountability mechanisms. The government apparently held the belief that any formal consultative committees would simply be used by self-interested producer and beneficiary groups to recapture influence over government policy and decision-making.

Secondly, the government attacked key public critics such as Justice Fogarty. For example, the Premier accused Fogarty of extraordinary behaviour in making his report on protective services available to the media prior to its official release. He also called sections of the report emotive and ill-informed, and threatened to bar Fogarty from consideration for future government work (Kennett quoted in Dunlevy & Hughes, 1993). Other Ministers, including the Attorney-General Jan Wade, also attacked Fogarty and his report.

In a related instance, a leading government bureaucrat allegedly threatened to cut the funding of the Children's Welfare Association of Victoria if it continued to speak out against government policies (Milburn, 1994). The government also attempted unsuccessfully to impose confidentiality clauses on community agencies as part of their funding agreements with the Department of Human Services (Green & Miller, 1997; Morrison, 1997).

Thirdly, the government took steps to directly silence internal critics. For example, the chief magistrate of the Children's Court, Greg Levine, was asked to resign (and did so) following his criticism of government cuts to children's services (Tippet, 1994; Conroy, 1995). In addition, a number of child protection workers who spoke out against government policies were either dismissed or suspended (Mottram, 1999a; 1999b).

THE CHILD PROTECTION STRIKE

The child protection strike of March 1996 provided another example of the Kennett Government's intolerance of dissent. Instead of negotiating with the State Public Services Federation on the wages and conditions sought by employees, the government used a variety of bullying and intimidatory tactics to force child protection workers back to work.

For example, the government placed large, expensive advertisements in the daily Melbourne newspapers urging employees to return to work. Noticeably, these advertisements made emotive references to the impact of the strike on department clients, claiming that union actions had placed 'vulnerable children and young people at risk' (H&CS, 1996a), and that 'clients were distressed, confused, hurt and in some cases angry that their case managers are on strike' (H&CS, 1996b). Yet, ironically, the caring ethos espoused by these advertisements was completely at odds with the government's own ideological position and demonstrated actions in the child protection area (Weeks, 1996).

The strike also provoked considerable conflict between Department management and staff, and allegations of threats and harassment from both sides (Chatley, 1996; Donnelly et al 1997). After three weeks, staff returned to work without the government meeting any of their demands. Subsequently, a number of disillusioned protective workers left the Department (Yallop, 1996).

POSTSCRIPT: THE LABOR ALTERNATIVE

The Kennett Government's election defeat in September 1999 brought to power a Labor Party committed in principle to a different agenda for child protection services.

In particular, the ALP appears to be granting a higher priority to prevention and support services, and to a renewed partnership with the community sector in the planning and delivery of services (Campbell 2000).

For example, the ALP has promised to abolish compulsory competitive tendering in human services; to recognise advocacy as a legitimate role for community organisations; and to encourage participation by community members and

organizations in planning, monitoring and evaluating services. It has also pledged to provide improved funding for non-government prevention, treatment and support services for children at risk of neglect and abuse; to ensure an improved service and residential provision for children taken into care; to introduce new accountability measures for child protection services; and to retain direct government responsibility for all statutory services (ALP, 1999, pp.15 & 20-21).

Only time will tell whether these promises are fulfilled. However, the ALP has already symbolically renamed the former Youth and Family Services Division the Community Care Division, and appointed the social researcher, Professor Jan Carter, to review child protection services. The government has also promised to establish a new Ministerial Advisory Committee on child, youth and family services to oversee policy development (Saltau, 1999; People Focus, February 2000, p.6; DHS, 2000).

... the ALP appears to be granting a higher priority to prevention and support services, and to a renewed partnership with the community sector in the planning and delivery of services.

CONCLUSION

This article has examined the influence of the Kennett Government's neo-liberal agenda on Victorian child protection services. Attention has been drawn to the manner in which this agenda impacted negatively on outcomes for children and families involved with the protection system due to its focus on political and ideological priorities, rather than a concern for enhanced services.

Examples cited include the poorly-timed introduction of mandatory reporting and the associated diversion of resources from support and prevention services to statutory investigation; the inadequate response to demonstrated links between

child abuse and poverty; and the systematic censorship of external and internal critics.

Whilst the new ALP Government has promised a new agenda for child protection services in Victoria, it remains to be seen whether they can repair the damage of the Kennett years. In particular, there is an urgent need to restore the balance between funding of statutory investigation and broader support and prevention services, and to ensure that all children and families referred to protective services (whether leading to court orders or not) are able to access adequate supports and resources. □

REFERENCES

- Aldous, J. (1994), *Mandatory Reporting*, Melbourne: VCTA Publishing.
- Alford, J. et al (1994), 'The Contract State' in J. Alford and D.O'Neill (eds.) *The Contract State: Public Management and the Kennett Government*, Melbourne: Deakin University Press, 1-20.
- Armytage, P. (1994), 'The challenges that lie ahead in 1995', *Momentum*, 2(7), 3.
- Atkins, C. & McCaughey, J. (1999), *Social Justice Report Card - Women: Balancing Social Justice with Economic Efficiency*, Melbourne: People Together Project.
- Auditor-General (1996), *Protecting Victoria's Children: The Role of the Department of Human Services*, Melbourne: Victorian Government.
- Australian Labor Party (1999), *Labor: New Solutions*, Melbourne: ALP.
- Baker, K. (1996a), 'Panel Comments' in *Proceedings of The Utopian Quest for Social Justice Conference*, Melbourne: Galatians, 69-75.
- Baker, K. (1996b), 'Time for a kinder, gentler courage', *The Age*, 26 March.
- Bayliss, M. & Carter, H. (1994), *Which Bums in What Beds?* Melbourne: St Anthony's Family Services.
- Bessant, J. (1999), 'How a State Changed its Government: From Kennett to Bracks', *Just Policy*, 17 (December), 4-10.
- Blacher, Y. (1996), 'The Redevelopment of Youth and Family Services', *Keynote Address to CWAV Seminar: Strategic Management in the Contract State*, Melbourne.
- Blacher, Y. (1997), 'Outsourcing: Opportunity or Threat - Nine Misconceptions About Competitive Tendering', *Address to CWAV Conference: The Cutting Edge*, Melbourne, 35-45.
- Brennan, D. (1998), 'Government and Civil Society' in P.Smyth and B. Cass (eds.) *Contesting the Australian Way*, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 124-137.

- Bursian, O. (1995), 'Economic Liberalism and the Community Services Industry: A Case Study', *Just Policy*, 3(June), 3-10.
- Campbell, C. (2000) 'Clara's story demands our attention', *The Age*, 27 October.
- Carney, T. (1984), *Child Welfare Practice and Legislation Review*, Melbourne: Victorian Government.
- Carney, T. (1989), 'A Fresh Approach to Child Protection Practice and Legislation in Australia', *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 13, 29-39.
- Carter, J.; Burston, O; Floyd, F. & Stewart, J. (1988), *Mandatory Reporting and Child Abuse*, Melbourne: Brotherhood of St Laurence.
- Chandler, J. (1993), 'Doctors might relent on abuse reporting', *The Age*, 27 March.
- Chatley, B. (1996), 'A Middle Manager's Perspective of the H & CS Industrial Dispute', *Australian Association of Social Workers Victorian Branch Newsletter*; 5(2) (May), 19-21.
- Children's Welfare Association of Victoria (1997), *Child Protection Project Report*, Melbourne: CWAV.
- Children's Welfare Association of Victoria (1998), *Australian Labor Party Brief: Children, Young People and Families*, Melbourne: CWAV.
- Children's Welfare Association of Victoria (1999), *87th Annual Report*, Melbourne: CWAV.
- Choi, Ching et al (1999), *Australia's Welfare Services & Assistance*, Canberra: Australian Institute of Health & Welfare.
- Clark, R. (1995), 'Child Protection Services in Victoria', *Family Matters*, 40(Autumn), 22-23.
- Conroy, P. (1995), 'Levine leaves Children's Court', *The Age*, 14 September.
- Crooks, M. & Webber, M. (1993), *State Finances and Public Policy in Victoria*, Melbourne: The Victoria Foundation.
- Department of Human Services (1997a), *The Redevelopment of Victoria's Youth and Family Services*, Melbourne: Victorian Government.
- Department of Human Services (1997b), *State Government Budget 1997-98*, Melbourne: Victorian Government.
- Department of Human Services (2000), *New Partnerships in Community Care*, Melbourne: Victorian Government.
- Donnelly, Barb et al (1997) 'Letter to the AASW', *Australian Association of Social Workers Victorian Branch Newsletter*, 5(5), 8.
- Dunlevy, L. & Hughes, G. (1993), 'Kennett hits out at Fogarty and his report', *The Age*, 24 September.
- Easterbrook, M. (1994), 'What to do about the children?', *The Age*, 27 August.
- Ernst, J. & Webber, M. (1996), 'Ideology and Interests: Privatisation in Theory and Practice' in M. Webber and M. Crooks (eds.) *Putting the People Last: Government Services and Rights in Victoria*, Melbourne: Hyland House, 113-140.
- Fernandez, E. (1996), *Significant Harm*, Avebury: Ashgate.
- Fernandez, E. (1998), 'Realities of Women's Caring: Rethinking Child Welfare Interventions' in E. Fernandez, K. Heycox, L. Hughes and M. Wilkinson (eds.) *Women Participating in Global Change*, Hong Kong: International Association of Schools of Social Work, 221-239.
- Fogarty, J. (1993), *Protective Services for Children in Victoria*, Melbourne: Victorian Government.
- Fredman, J. & Green, S. (1994), *In Whose Care?* Melbourne: Mission to the Streets and Lanes.
- Garbutt, S. (1993), 'Children and Young Persons Bill', *Legislative Assembly Hansard*, 29 April, 47-56.
- Goddard, C. & Liddell, M. (1995), 'Child Abuse Fatalities and the Media: Lessons from a Case Study', *Child Abuse Review*, 4, 356-364.
- Goddard, C. (1996), *Child abuse and child protection*, Melbourne: Churchill Livingstone.
- Goddard, C. & Tucci, J. (1997), 'Learning to listen to children in need', *The Age*, 10 December.
- Green, J. & Miller, C. (1997), 'Gag claim over welfare funding', *The Age*, 30 July.
- Hancock, K. (1994), 'Child Abuse: The Obligation to Report', *ACTCOSS News*, 9(4), 47-51.
- Hancock, L. (1999), 'The Justice System and Accountability', in B. Costar and N. Economou (eds.) *The Kennett Revolution*, Sydney: UNSW Press, 37-50.
- Hancock, L. & Cowling, S. (1999), *Searching for Social Advantage: What has Happened to the Social Dividend for Victorians?* Melbourne: Women's Audit Project.
- Hayward, D. (1999), 'A Financial Revolution?: The Politics of the State Budget' in B. Costar and N. Economou (eds.) *The Kennett Revolution*, UNSW Press: Sydney, 135-149.
- Health & Community Services (1996a), 'Appeal to Staff of the Department of Health and Community Services', *The Age*, 12 March.
- Health & Community Services (1996b), 'It's Time to Come Back to Work', *The Age*, 18 March.
- Holland, G. (1998), 'The influence of mandatory reporting legislation on doctors' reporting behaviour', *Master of Social Science Thesis*, Melbourne: Australian Catholic University.
- Holland, G. (1999), 'Mandatory reporting of abuse', *Youth Studies*, 18(2), 30-36.
- Hood, M. (1998), 'The interplay between poverty, unemployment, family disruption and all types of child abuse', *Children Australia*, 23(2), 28-32.
- Hough, G. (1995), 'Dismantling Child Welfare' in S. Rees and G. Rodley (eds.) *The Human Costs of Managerialism*, Leichhardt: Pluto Press, 173-181.
- Hudson, R. & Wiseman, J. (1995), 'The fat man cometh? The initial policy directions of the Victorian Liberal/National Party Government' in J. Spoehr and R. Broomhill (eds.) *Altered States*, Adelaide: Centre for Labour Studies, 182-195.
- Inglis, R. (1994), *Competition - Who Wins? The Impact of State Coalition Government Policies in the Western Region of Melbourne*, Melbourne: Victoria University of Technology.
- John, M. (1992), *Ministerial Statement*, Melbourne, 25 November.
- Johnstone, M. (1999), *Reporting Child Abuse: Ethical Issues for the Nursing Profession and Nurse Regulating Authorities*, Melbourne: RMIT University.
- Kohler, A. (1997), 'The radical right wing speeds the Kennett revolution', *The Age*, 14 February.
- Lawrence-Karski, R. (1997), 'United States: California's Reporting System' in N. Gilbert (ed.) *Combating Child Abuse*, New York: Oxford University Press, 9-34.
- Lindsey, D. (1994), *The Welfare of Children*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- McMahon, A. (1998) *Damned if you do, Damned if you don't: Working in child welfare*, Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Melville, R. (1998), 'The State and Third Sector Organizations: Renegotiating the Relationship in the 1990s', *Address to 27th Annual Arnova Conference*, Seattle.
- Mendes, P. (1994), 'The Fogarty Report and the Politics of Child Protection', *Victorian Council of Social Service Policy Issues Forum*, Autumn, 13-21.
- Mendes, P. (1996), 'The historical and political context of mandatory reporting and its impact on child protection practice in Victoria', *Australian Social Work*, 49(4), 25-32.
- Mendes, P. (1997), 'Child protection and child abuse in Victoria: What is going wrong?', *Address to CWAV Conference: The Cutting Edge*, Melbourne, 178-194.
- Mendes, P. (1999), 'Marxist and feminist critiques of child protection', *Children Australia*, 24(2), 27-31.
- Milburn, C. (1994), 'Public critics, private warnings', *The Age*, 29 October.
- Mitchell, B. (1996), *Report from America: Child Welfare and Child Protection Services*, Melbourne: St Anthony's Family Service.
- Momentum/People Focus (1993-2000), Melbourne: Victorian Government.
- Morrison, P. (1997), 'Sector meets to discuss confidentiality clause', *VCOSS Noticeboard*, 10(7), 4-5.
- Mottram, M. (1999a), 'Legal case may protect whistleblowers', *The Age*, 24 August.
- Mottram, M. (1999b), 'Ruling may set employee precedent', *The Age*, 1 December.
- Naphine, D. (1997), 'Abuse reports up, but so is budget', *The Age*, 17 January.
- Osborne, D. & Gaebler, T. (1993), *Reinventing Government*, New York: Penguin.
- Pegler, T. (1997), 'Fears child protection may go private', *The Age*, 10 March.
- Prent, J. & Lewis, P. (1996), *Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Families*

Investigated by Protective Services, Melbourne: Victorian Government.

Prideaux, J. (1999), *Keeping Children Safe - A Shared Responsibility: An Evaluation of the Community Education Program*, Canberra: ACT Child Abuse Prevention and Education Unit.

Raysmith, H. (1994), *Dorothy and the Satellites: Child care, child protection and family support in Victoria*, Richmond: Hop, Step and Jump.

Russell, B. (1999), 'Rebuilding Victoria after Kennett', *Dissent*, Summer, 54-57.

Saltu, C. (1999), 'More money for children, needy', *The Age*, 14 December.

Salvaris, M. (1995), 'Jeff Kennett's Anti-Government' in S.Rees and G.Rodley (eds.) *The Human Costs of Managerialism*, Leichhardt: Pluto Press, 145-158.

Scott, D. (1995), 'Child Protection: Paradoxes of Publicity, Policy and Practice', *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, 30(1), 71-94.

Scott, L. (1999), 'Children pay the price of poverty', *The Australian*, 11 October.

Self, P. (1993), *Government by the Market? The Politics of Public Choice*, MacMillan: London.

Sheil, C. (1999), *The State of the States 1999*, Sydney: Public Sector Research Centre.

Swain, P. (1998), 'What is Belief on Reasonable Grounds?', *Alternative Law Journal*, 23(5), 230-233.

Thorpe, D. (1997), 'Policing minority child-rearing practices in Australia' in N.Parton (ed.) *Child Protection and Family Support*, London: Routledge, 59-77.

Tippet, G. (1994), 'Uproar as magistrate told to quit', *The Age*, 21 September.

Tomison, A. (1996), 'Child Protection Towards 2000', *Child Abuse Prevention*, 4(2), 1-3.

Victorian Council of Social Service (1993), *Submission to Fogarty Review: Strengthening the Community's Capacity to Protect its Children and Young People*, Melbourne: VCOSS.

Victorian Council of Social Service (1998), *Strengthening Communities: DHS Youth and Family Service Redevelopment*, Melbourne: VCOSS.

Victorian Family & Children's Services Council (1992), *Response to the Minister's Request for Advice on Mandatory Reporting*, Melbourne: VFCS.

Vinson, T. (1999), *Unequal in Life: the distribution of social disadvantage in Victoria and New South Wales*, Melbourne: Jesuit Social Services.

Weeks, W. (1996), 'State cuts set the scene for a storm', *The Age*, 25 March.

Were, A. (1994), 'Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse in Victoria: Impacts in Non-Government Services', *Newslink*, June, 1-6.

Winkworth, G. (1997), 'Mandatory Reporting in the ACT: Are We Ready?', *Australian Association of Social Workers ACT Newsletter*.

Wiseman, J. (1992) 'Development and Outcome of the Victorian Social Justice Statement' in M.Considine & B.Costar (eds.) *Trials in Power*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 85-98.

Yallop, R. (1996), 'Low morale drives child welfare crisis', *The Australian*, 2 November.

Young, L.; Baker, J. & Monnone, T. (1989), *Poverty and Child Abuse in the Sydney Metropolitan Area*, Sydney: Department of Family and Community Services.

CHILDREN AUSTRALIA 2001

(Volume 26)

(For new subscribers only)

| | |
|---------------------------------------|------------|
| Standard subscription..... | \$60.50 pa |
| Student (full-time) subscription..... | \$44.00 pa |
| Overseas subscription (airmail) | \$75.00 pa |

NB: Standard and student subscription rates include GST

Name.....

If student, course & academic institution.....

Organisation.....

Address

Postcode Telephone..... Fax.....

Cheque/money order enclosed OR Debit Bankcard Visa Mastercard Expiry date Amount \$.....

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|

TAX INVOICE REQUIRED?

Cardholder name..... Signature.....

PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY

Send to: Children Australia, PO Box 7020, Dandenong, Vic 3175

Date.....

Enquiries: Lorraine Redshaw Tel: 03 9791 5423 Email: l.redshaw@ozchild.com.au