6. We must provide high quality, stable, therapeutic residential care for the children and adolescents who need this form of care. This requires major rethinking in our models of residential care so that staff turnover is minimised.

7. Legislation and policy must be reformed so that it makes the above possible. That is, we need a legislative and policy framework which facilitates primary and secondary prevention AND which also strengthens the capacity of the system to respond to the needs of those children who fall through these safety nets. These objectives are not mutually exclusive. In some States (for example, Victoria) the pendulum swing against the removal policies of the1960s has gone to such an extreme that 'the least restrictive option' approach is inflicting serious harm. It is possible to have a system that implements diversionary strategies for most children who come within its reach while actively intervening with the minority of children who need a high level of statutory protection.

CONCLUSION

It is easy in the child welfare field to become demoralized and end up feeling a level of despair which mirrors that of the families with whom we work. This is of no help to them or to us. Nor is despair justified. If we adopt an historical perspective we are able to see just how far we have come. Understanding the past should therefore give us the courage to address new challenges and overcome the shortcomings of our current policies and practices. Unless we do so we will stand condemned by those who follow us as having failed this generation of children. ◆

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