

# Editorial

The publication of our first issue for 1978 coincides with the launching of an interesting and hopefully significant campaign to modernise and make relevant the family and community welfare services of the State of Victoria. As a precursor to the drawing up of a White Paper on new family and community services, the Victorian Consultative Committee on Social Development, on behalf of the Minister for Social Welfare, Brian Dixon, has embarked on a State-wide consultation. Using the Regional Consultative Committee structure the general public are asked to comment on six questions:

1. What do you or your family want from community services?
2. How could we make it easier for people to use these services?
3. How can more people play a part in their community?
4. How do we make sure that people know where to go for information on community services?
5. How would you like to change the Social Welfare Department?
6. How can people get better value from money spent on community services?

This approach represents a great leap forward in several ways. Not only does it emphasise the importance of seeking the opinions of actual and potential consumers of public welfare services, but it also implies the failure of the professional care-givers to devise policies and programmes in line with current needs and contemporary programme development. The Minister himself has been under great pressure during the last two years

from lay pressure groups to do something about the backward policies, labyrinthine procedures and slow response to new ideas of many key public servants. We should not really be surprised at this because the public service in most States has a reputation equal to that of Dicken's Circumlocution Office. An increasingly restive public has realised that the only way round this block is to go straight to the top. In Victoria they have in Brian Dixon a most receptive ear. Unlike so many parliamentarians he combines intelligence with a rare degree of sensitivity about social issues. The politician in him is evident in his euphemistic description of the Social Welfare Department as "inward looking", and his lack of in-depth understanding of some selfare issues led him to assert that if the State Government could legislate annually on horse racing (he is also Minister for Youth, Sport and Recreation) there was no reason why it could not act similarly on adoption. However, his concern to get things done coupled with recent changes in senior positions in the Department, and the greater impact on policy and practice of the (albeit belated) regional structure could make the consultation more than just an exercise in political window dressing. In a State where so many social policies seem firmly rooted in the C19 and where some State Wards are cared for by at least one agent organisation which segregates boys and girls in its institution, change is long overdue.

The question of how the users of social welfare services rate what

they receive in terms of their own needs and aspirations is likely to be a central issue for the next few years. Whilst it is essential to involve potential users in shaping future services, we can also learn much from a study of past policies and from asking those who have recently been "on the receiving end" for their reactions. The recently published Report of the Royal Commission on Human Relationships reviewed by Richard Chisholm, contains many revealing statements about quality of service and the feelings of the "client". In a different way Michael Horsburgh gives us a series of fascinating insights into feelings and attitudes behind adoption practices in New South Wales in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In an attempt to further public awareness on contemporary issues in social welfare, we plan to publish an occasional column of consumers' views. Anyone wishing to contribute material should write to me at Monash University, or telephone (03) 541-2977. Where appropriate or necessary, contributions may be published anonymously.

Practitioners should find much valuable resource material in Loula Rodopoulos' article on research into Greek families. Her examination of the relevant literature should be particularly helpful to those who lack either the access to, or the time to, examine original sources. The size of the Greek immigrant community more than warrants careful study of this article.

Cliff Picton