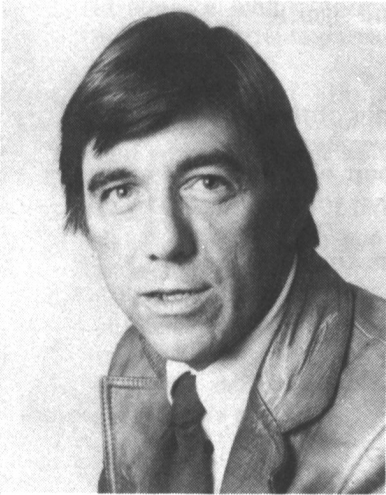


Quality of Life and the Evaluation of Quality of Care



An address given by
Graeme Gregory to the
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God bless Mummy. I know that's
right.
Wasn't it fun in the bath tonight?
The cold's so cold, and the hot's so
hot.
Oh! God bless Daddy — I quite
forgot.

If I open my fingers a little bit more
I can see Nanny's dressing gown on
the door.
It's a beautiful blue, but it hasn't a
hood.
Oh! God bless Nanny and make her
good.

Mine has a hood, and I lie in bed,
And pull the hood tight over my
head,
And I shut my eyes, and I curl up
small,
And nobody knows that I'm there at
all.

Oh! Thank you God for a lovely
day.
And what was the other I had to
say?
I said "Bless Daddy", so what can it
be?
Oh! Now I remember it. God bless
me. (1)

Whether or not A.A. Milne ac-
curately reflected childhood ex-
periences in 1924, this is certainly
the picture of childhood experience
and expectation with which many of
us grew up. As an aside, I would
note that another English poet, Kit
Wright, writing in 1978, comes up
with a vastly different picture of life
through a child's eyes:

My Mum is on a diet,
My dad is on the booze,
My Gran's out playing Bingo
And she was born to lose.

My brother's stripped his motorbike
Although it's bound to rain.
My sister's playing Elton John
Over and over again.

What a dim old family!
What a dreary lot!
Sometimes I think that I'm the only
Superstar they've got. (2)

I wonder if Christopher Robin
WAS as nice and good as his father
painted him, or whether he was real-
ly a little rogue, and A.A. Milne was
picturing the child he WISHED his
son was? Children are frequently
subject to unreal adult expectations,
expected to fulfil role functions
related more to the needs of adults
than of the children themselves. The
adage "Children should be seen and
not heard" was framed for the good
of adults. Similarly, we expect our
children to sing hymns that can only
be interpreted as not so subtle adult
coercion:

"The cattle are lowing, the baby
awakes.
But little Lord Jesus no crying He
makes."

"Christian children all must be
Mild, obedient, good as He."

On the one side, we fantasize, romanticize about childhood. Or on the other, we expect children to be little old adults, robbed of their childhood altogether. I have seen this reflected in the decisions of those magistrates and judges who usually preside over adult courts, making judgement in children's court matters. Some have made unreasonably lenient decisions about child offenders, others have been unreasonably harsh — all because they had unreal expectations of childhood.

Role Reversal

Mark Flanzraich and Irene Dunsavage, of the Children's Program of the Family Life Education Centre in Newark, New Jersey, have described the role reversal behaviour observed among abused and/or neglected children whose parents tend to act dependent upon them: "Lyle, age four, sleeps with his mother, who uses him to show and provide affection to her. Lyle's mother says that she encourages him to hug, kiss, dance with and protect the little girls in their apartment building. 'Lyle has to know what it is to be a man,' she explains." (3)

What SHOULD children be able to expect of childhood? My answer to that question could be the short title of this address, "Quality of Life, and Evaluation of the Quality of Care". What should a child be able to expect of childhood? The right to be a child.

The Red Wine of Life

After writing 606 pages of his book "Child Welfare Services", Alfred Kadushin finishes up with a personal comment — "taking the liberty of editorialising". He writes: "The red wine of life, the passion in the encounter with the child denied a childhood, needs to be included here as an addition to the factual data regarding the child welfare

worker." (4) That phrase "children denied a childhood" sticks with me. In the Preamble to the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child, the stated objective of the Declaration is "that he (the child) may have a happy childhood and enjoy for his own good and for the good of society the rights and freedoms herein set forth . . ." Childhood is not merely a transitional period on the way to adulthood. It is, like every year of our life, a time to be lived, and hopefully enjoyed, in its own right. Ian Cox says "Concern for the present, the today, should take a significant priority over planning for the future of the child as an adult. Residential care seems to have the motto, 'the children of today are the adults of tomorrow, and we should train, influence, indoctrinate, discipline, to prepare for that future world.' But these children are living now, their loves, their joys, their fears and their anxieties relate to the now; the present has real force and relevance." (5)

Right to Childhood

The child's right to childhood is a right that has to be consciously recognised and fostered by the adult population. We cannot give an unconditional guarantee to our children that they will be happy and fulfilled — that they will ENJOY their childhood. But we **can** make the corporate and personal resolve that as far as we are concerned, we will do all in our power to create that physical and emotional environment, that personal and social context, in which opportunity to be a child is maximised.

Childhood is the most vital developmental stage of a person, in which many determinants of future physical and emotional well-being are established. In the various developmental stages of childhood, a child gains the major part of his language and motor skills, his ability to love and relate to others, as

well as completing his physical growth.

Vulnerable

Childhood is vulnerable and fragile because the child is dependent on other people for the meeting of physical and emotional and intellectual needs. He is dependent on those responsible for his day-to-day needs such as his parents, and on the society in the context of which he grows.

Different

All children are different, but it is possible to identify and conceptualise their developing needs. Progressively a child has:

- * physiological needs, e.g. hunger, thirst
- * safety needs, e.g. security, stability
- * belongingness and love needs, e.g. affection, identification
- * esteem needs, e.g. prestige, self respect
- * need for self actualisation, i.e. making actual what is potential in the self, the maximal realisation of one's potentialities. (6)

All these needs presume dependence on, and interaction with, peers and adults.

From the general question: "What should children be able to expect of childhood?" I move to two specific questions that are part of the whole.

1. What should children be able to expect of adult people? A child's very existence is dependent on the whim of his parents, but the act of parenting will not guarantee that he will be wanted or cared for, or that his developmental needs will be met. He may be invisible within his family unit, and whether or not his needs are met may be unknown to others in the community.

Royal Commission

In the introduction to the section of its report on the family, the Royal Commission on Human Relationships notes: "All children need adults to nurture them, to give them love and security, stimulation and the chance to grow. Within the family, a child learns about himself and the world outside. He learns what it means to be a boy or girl, what it is to love and be loved, what it is to feel anger, what it is to be part of mankind. As Margaret Mead, the eminent anthropologist, says: 'We have never discovered any other way to produce responsible human beings except through the family.' Yet the family, which can give a child so much, can also bring it harm. Within the family can lie ignorance, neglect, violence and despair." (7).

Australian Family

However, the Royal Commission on Human Relationships also noted that the Australian family today is different from what it was even a quarter of a century ago. Personally, I do not believe that we can define 'family' as only being a married mother and father and the children, although that is still the most typical pattern and configuration. It has been estimated, for instance, that 8.8% of families supporting children in Australia have only one parent — 1% with a male parent only, and 7.8% with a female parent only. (8) With this ratio of nearly 1 in 10 being lone parent families it becomes clear that such families represent one significant variation on family format in Australia.

Mia Kellmer Pringle identifies a "stable, continuous, dependable and loving relationship with parents (or permanent parent substitutes)" as the means by which children's needs for love and security are usually met. (9) In particular, the emotional stability of children under three can be impaired by even short term disruption or absence

from the significant adult persons in their life.

Those of you who know the work of the Robertsons, and have seen their films on short separation from their parents, will know how dramatically they have been able to identify the emotional dependency of young children on their parents, particularly their mother. I would not necessarily crusade for maternity leave, but I do consider that paternity leave should be available universally for fathers of pre-school age children to enable them to provide familiar and consistent adult care when the mother is in hospital having another child. The recent decision of the Commonwealth Government to abolish paternity leave in the public service can be seen as an anti-child measure. The effects of maternal separation on very young children could also be an argument for home confinements.

Children should be able to expect of adults that they will help meet and fulfil their needs for love and security, praise and recognition, new experiences, and responsibility appropriate to their stage of development. If fulfilled, these needs promote personalities which can give and accept love, can express and control emotions, can grow in ways which satisfy the individuals themselves, and society as a whole. (10)

2. What should children be able to expect of society? Immediately following the previously quoted comments of the Human Relationships Royal Commission Report on the Family come these words: ". . . just as the child is vulnerable to the family, so are families vulnerable to the society of which they are part. Malnutrition, poor housing, unemployment and discrimination are only a few of the pressures which can effect family life and well-being. Therefore, although families carry responsibility for providing day-to-day care and protection of children, society equally carries a responsibility to see that

families can undertake this most important of human tasks in a manner that allows for individual freedom, yet at the same time provides security and love." (11)

While much that society does is for the sake of children, children have the right to expect far more. Welfare, education and health (or more accurately, sickness) services too often call for conformity to set systems rather than themselves set out to conform to the needs of children and to take seriously their individual differences. The July 1978 "New Horizons in Child Care" seminar in Alice Springs resolved that: "In providing for the needs of children and families, programmes should be created to meet the needs of people, and not that people should inappropriately have to fit in with programmes. Consequently, it is essential that a wide range of support and care should be provided and encouraged in the community, working with flexibility and adaptability."

Major Shift

We are beginning to see a major shift in the community's work with children whose families cannot cope. This was reflected in another Alice Springs resolution: "We acknowledge that the goal of child and youth welfare is not principally to care for the child, not principally to cure the child, not principally to be an advocate for the child, not principally to create neat systems that substitute for the family — BUT to guard most anxiously and with the utmost vigilance, the child's right to HIS family, or in absolutely exceptional circumstances, an alternative, permanent nurturing family." Many child care agencies recognise the need for this shift from residential care to working with non-coping families to prevent separation of the children. But too often human and capital resources cannot be re-allocated, income and subsidies are too often tied to one form of care, and are unavailable for alternatives.

Youth Unemployment

A third Alice Springs resolution dealt with youth unemployment. As the father of a teenage son becoming increasingly depressed by the prospect of having no job when he leaves school, no opportunity to express vocation, I share the urgency of this resolution: "Young people have the right to, and the need for work, vocational choice, and vocational training. We regard youth unemployment as the major youth problem in Australia today. We urge governments to make youth employment an absolute priority. We urge continuing support and funding for community based centres for unemployed youth." Children have the right to expect that they will be able to take their place in the work force, to "earn their space on earth".

Children have the right to expect a commitment to their interests from governments. However, while Commonwealth and State governments have committed themselves to the observation of the International Year of the Child in 1979, one might be excused for assuming that the Commonwealth government is celebrating IYC by further depriving Australian children of support and opportunity.

The Federal government has allocated only \$165,000 towards observance of IYC in Australia, apart from normal departmental expenditure which may be allocated. Of this, \$100,000 will be used on publicity and consciousness raising. This allocation contrasts dramatically with the millions that were allocated, appropriately, for International Women's Year.

Children lack the ability to embarrass governments (unless an attempt is made to tax their pocket money). The child is without vote, power or influence — hence the need for an international year focussing on his rights. By refusing significant funding, the Commonwealth highlights the insignificance and powerlessness of

the child, and limits the effective observation of the International Year of the Child.

I have asked three questions that I believe are relevant to the quality of life for a child, and to which our response is relevant in the evaluation of our care and services for children.

In reverse, these questions were:

What should children be able to expect of society?

What should children be able to expect of adult people?

In brief, my response to these two of the questions has been that children have the right to expect those relationships, those supports, that environment that will work positively to meet their needs for love and security, praise and recognition, new experiences, and responsibility.

The first, and overall question I have asked is: "What should children be able to expect of childhood?" My response — the right, not only to survive but to enjoy being a child.

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