

New
Directions in
Aboriginal
(N'UNGA')
in South
Australia

BY JOHN AUSTIN

A. HISTORICAL ISSUES IN
ABORIGINAL CHILD
WELFARE

In traditional Aboriginal communities the young were cared for by the COMBINED efforts of relatives. Traditional social/cultural values included an emphasis on the extended family as the basic unit, with responsibility for the welfare of each member of a tribe being shared by all. Methods of child-rearing emphasised undemanding security and physical demonstration of affection, rather than discipline, training and material comforts. The structure of the extended family varied from tribe to tribe with different members having primary responsibility for child care.

With the impact of colonization on the traditional culture came changes in family structures, a breakdown of traditional ways of subsistence which dramatically altered ways.

At the very least, aboriginal children, since colonization, have been subject to a continual process of intervention and disruption from their aboriginal families and heritage to such an extent, that one could easily be justified for

categorizing this process of destruction as a form of **genocide**.

A familiar catch-cry of dogooders and paternalistic administrators, based on acute ethnocentrism has been; "they (aborigines) don't know how to raise their children" or "we can't change/civilize the adults, lets train the children;" and as a consequence official policies of removal and an upbringing in white controlled institutions and placement with white families.

An example of the type of legislation that embodied the above is as follows:—

"by the 1936 (Native Administration) Act, W.A. no native parent or other relative living has the guardianship of an aboriginal or half-caste child (section 8)" (1).

The essential ingredient of official practices designed to help destroy the aboriginal social fabric was the removal of children from their families. By doing this, white Australia could effectively encapsulate all the destruction and atrocity committed against the myriad of aboriginal spiritual — cultural and social organisation.

B. THE PRESENT SITUATION

Although traditional ways have been undermined, today in South Australia, communities still place importance on kinship ties and patterns of sharing. Voluntary co-operation, equality and solidarity are still values accepted and acted upon. Child rearing is flexible and discipline of children does not take precedence over bestowing love and affection. Aboriginal people feel that where love and warmth are the mainstay of the family, they should not be victimized for living in a culture of poverty.

spent part of their childhood in a children's home or foster home, were subsequently committed either for juvenile or adult offences". (3).

This situation has been confirmed in recent years by the experience of the Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement as expressed by their field officers. Figures provided by the A.L.R.M. show that of all the children committed to Care and Control in the Juvenile Courts between the years 1974-77, 16% were aboriginal.

More recently, figures show that presently one out of six children un-

C. WHAT IS BEING DONE?

In recent years the Department for Community Welfare has acknowledged the appalling failure rate of the established method of child placement of aboriginal children. Until now, they were not able to provide an alternative to white foster placement and institutionalization because of the lack of understanding and trust between the Aboriginal community and the Department. Recently an Aboriginal Child Care Agency has been established in the Adelaide Aboriginal Community, it is based

Figures show that institutionalization and foster care and adoption have detrimental effects . . .

It has been found that Aboriginal children brought up while living away from their parents make up a significant proportion of the Aboriginal population of Adelaide. Gale (2) found that those who had spent some of their childhood in a children's home or a foster home, made up twenty five percent (25%) of a survey population of 2000 persons. She adds that, "almost half of the Aborigines living in Adelaide in 1966, aged between ten and nineteen years, had spent a portion of their lives in isolation from their Aboriginal kinfolk".

Figures she provides, show that institutionalization and foster care and adoption have severe detrimental effects on the children in later years.

Gale found that:— "one-third (1/3) of the Aboriginal people who

der Care and Control is aboriginal and approximately half of these are in country centres. Furthermore, aborigines comprise 30% of all children in Foster Care in South Australia, the majority of these being placement with white foster parents.

The above, simply highlights the large number of aboriginal children who are isolated from their natural families, and it is disturbing when one considers that aborigines comprise only 0.9% of the total South Australian population.

References

- (1) Paul Hasluck. "Black Australians", (2nd Ed) Melb. Uni Press, at P. 161.
- (2) Fay Gale "Urban Aborigines" A.N.U. Press P 162.
- (3) Fay Gale op cit.

on the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency and is situated at the Aboriginal Community Centre.

It has received funds from a pilot project through the South Australian Family Support Scheme which is in turn funded by the Commonwealth Office of Child Care.

THE ABORIGINAL CHILD CARE AGENCY

Basic Principles

- (i) To reduce the loss of children to the Aboriginal community and provide them with both cultural and self-identity.
- (ii) The re-affirmation of the Aboriginal extended family in the nurturing and caring of youth.

The prevention of family breakdown and the preservation of the family.

(iii) The involvement of Aboriginal adults and young people in traditional helping roles.

(iv) Recognizing that the problems identified and dealt with in adolescence will inhibit delinquency and the over-representation of Aborigines in the juvenile justice system.

THE PROGRAM

The proposed program of the Child Care Agency is as follows:—

(a) To provide an alternative resource to both the Aboriginal Community, Statutory bodies such as the Department for Community Welfare and voluntary agencies for the prevention of Aboriginal child neglect, foster-care breakdown and institutionalization.

(b) To provide emergency foster-care on a temporary basis whilst Agency staff endeavour to provide (either directly or by drawing on other resources) supports for the family to bring about a situation where the child will be returned to its own family.

(c) To ensure that any non-Aboriginal family who have adopted or fostered Aboriginal children will guarantee to encourage Aboriginal identity in that child.

(d) To provide guidance and counselling to those couples and families who have already fostered Aboriginal children prior to the commencement of the Aboriginal Child Care Agency and to continue to provide assistance and advisory service to those couples who had adopted or fostered children through the Agency, particularly where they are experiencing cultural identity and other associated difficulties.

(e) To provide a service by trained staff for the assessment of those persons who wish to foster Aboriginal children.

(f) To provide a complementary service to existing community welfare and voluntary agencies to ensure the most suitable placement of Aboriginal children:

(g) To be available for consultation and advise as well as the absorption of responsibility for those children requiring Court advocacy in the exploration and provision of community placement and caring supports.

(h) To co-operate closely with the Department for Community Welfare and encourage and assist wherever possible to return Aboriginal children from institutions and Reception Centres to their natural parents and relatives where this is considered to be in the best interest of the child's welfare and where this is

not possible to an alternative Aboriginal supervisory environment such as regional group home or hostel.

*CONCLUSION

The very real concern of the Aboriginal Community about the loss of their children is not unreasonable, when one considers the possible outcry by the white community if one of every six of their children was not in their care.

The Development of an Aboriginal Child Care Agency is simply an attempt to allow aboriginal community involvement and control in matters of aboriginal child and family welfare.

It should be interesting to see the effects of the work of the Agency in the future, and provided there is a total commitment by all groups concerned, there is every reason to believe that aboriginal children and their families will benefit greatly.

NOTE

John Austin was a Social Planner (Aboriginal Welfare) in the Department for Community Welfare in South Australia. He was greatly involved in the establishment of the A.C.C.A. He is now director of the Aboriginal Community Centre, Adelaide.

The views expressed are not necessarily those of the Department.

Apology and Corrections

In our last issue we included a paper by Dr J. Kraus on the Adjustment of Adopted Children: Prognosis from Maternal and Natal "Risk" Factors. Unfortunately there were serious errors in the presentation of Dr Kraus' material which detract from his careful and important work. We apologise sincerely for these errors and reprint the corrections as follows:

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For the present purposes Bayes's formula can be expressed in generic terms as follows:

- d: childhood dysfunction
do: absence of childhood dysfunction d
r: 'risk' factor
p(r/d): conditional probability that a child drawn randomly from the population of children showing d will have r (Table 3)
p(r/do): conditional probability that a child drawn randomly from the population of children not showing d will have r (Table 3)
gd: prior probability that a child drawn randomly from the given population of children will show d
1-gd: prior probability that a child drawn randomly from the given population of children will not show d

p(d/r): posterior probability that a child having r will show d

$$p(d/r) = \frac{gd.p(r/d)}{(gd.p(r/d)) + (1-g)d.p(r/do)}$$

The prior probabilities of childhood dysfunctions (in terms of the classification used in analysis) are shown in Table 2. The relevant conditional probabilities are shown in Table 3.

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The SE of posterior p is calculated by the usual formula:

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$$SE = \sqrt{p(1-p)/N}$$

The posterior p, therefore, that a baby of a 16-year-old mother will show 11 to 15 manifestations of childhood dysfunction is: p =
 $\frac{0.1476 \times 0.2128}{(0.1476 \times 0.2128) + (1-p \ 0.1476) \times 0.1104}$
= 0.2480

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What confidence can one have in this result? The observed probabilities of the two risk factors are (Table 1): 16-year-old mother 0.133 (28/210), and unskilled occupation 0.181 (38/210); their joined probability is 0.133 x 0.181 0.024. The estimated N for the calculation of the SE is 0.024 x 210 5.04, and the SE is:

$$SE = \frac{\sqrt{0.407 \times (1-0.407)}}{5} = 0.219$$

Using the t distribution (with df 4), one can have about 70% confidence that the true probability of the child showing 11 to 15 manifestations lies between 0.188 and 0.626 (i.e. + ISE).

in Australia
1979
 is
FOR OUR CHILDREN



Care
 International Year of the Child 1979

So...

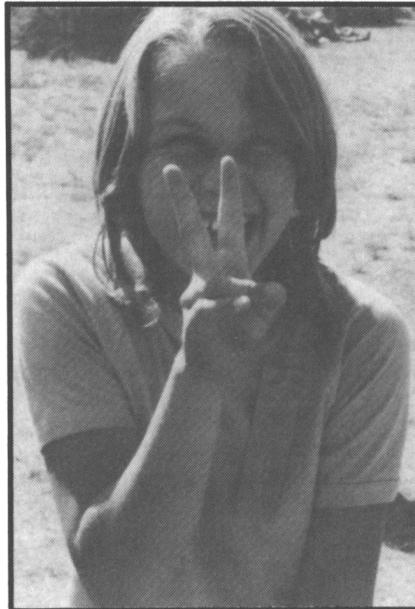
... federal, state and local governments, non-government organisations, business, community groups, families, individuals and children themselves

ARE thinking, talking, seeking, planning reviewing and renewing contributing, co-operating and **DOING** ... **MANY THINGS** both large and small to make sure that all the children of Australia have the best possible **CARE**

So that for them childhood is a purposeful, productive and enjoyable experience ...

1979
THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE CHILD

has been declared by the **UNITED NATIONS**, and it is up to us all in Australia to assess everything we do and should be doing for our children ... their health, education and welfare, their need for and access to services and facilities, their family and community involvement, their right to acceptance, understanding, love, warmth, security and happiness ...



... **RESOURCES** — both human effort and money are expended on activities amenities projects, programs and institutions for children

IYC is the time to assess the appropriateness and effectiveness of these efforts, energy and activities

ALREADY areas of obvious lack can and have been identified and innovative projects will be established to accommodate these needs.

IYC MEANS application of the initiative and enthusiasm characteristic of Australian adults from all walks of life — professionals, businessmen, teachers, volunteers, students, public servants, politicians, parents

AND the complete involvement of our children — seeking their ideas and contribution is central to the success of IYC ...

IT IS IMPORTANT that whatever we do it has a lasting benefit way beyond 1979 ...

AS A NATION OUR OBJECTIVE IS

'Care'

... **SO**

if you are planning and want more information, assistance, or advice consult the list below for your link into the IYC structure.

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