

THE CHILDREN'S SERVICES PROGRAM

The Children's Services Program, administered by the Office of Child Care within the Department of Social Security, funds a flexible network of services. The network ranges from early childhood care services to services for adolescents, for school aged children and for families. It also encompasses research, evaluation, information and training projects.

The main components of the Program include:

- pre-schools, which are funded through block grants to State Governments;
- centre-based day care facilities;
- family day care schemes;
- occasional and emergency care;
- outside school hours care and vacation care;
- family support services, which are provided through a three year pilot program run jointly with State Governments;
- youth services, based on emergency accommodation together with ancillary counselling and referral services, which are also provided through a three year pilot program run jointly with State Governments.

The Commonwealth sees its role as primarily a stimulus to innovative thinking by State, local and non-government organisations.

Low cost, imaginative projects which link in with existing services and facilities, and projects which provide a number of services, are encouraged.

Community involvement and self help in planning and administration of services is also encouraged.

The following articles are examples of some of the innovative and forward-looking projects funded from the Children's Services Program. The authors are, or were, involved with the organisations about which they wrote.

CHILD CARE IN THE 80's

Throughout the 1970's there was a tremendous expansion in the interest in services caring for children and assisting families, as many people involved in the planning and development of services were aware of needs which were not being met by the existing facilities. Over the ten years the increase in the number of local community groups formed by people coming together because they had a common concern and wanted to do something about it resulted in the funding of large numbers of projects.

Planning by community groups provided governments with the information about the needs of the people living in particular areas. Planning at the local level meant that there developed co-ordination and a linking up with other services and groups. This ensured that the ideas of the users of services more and more were incorporated into the initial planning, the policy making and in the devising of programs. I see this movement as continuing in the 1980's and assisting the Commonwealth to avoid duplication of service effort and to develop administrative practices which effectively support community activity in providing services for

children and families.

Since the establishment of the Office of Child Care in 1976 there has been a steady growth in the funds available and the scope of services assisted. In that time funds available for services other than pre-schools have more than doubled, from \$16.9 million in 1975-76 to \$36.1 million in 1979-80 and in the last financial year, a growth of 16% occurred.

In the 1980's Governments will be looking at different demographic indicators of need. There has been quite a lot of recent comment on two of these indicators, the declining birth rate and the ageing of the population.

For example, there has been discussion on the effect that the declining birth rate will have on the demand for education services. Discussion is developing on the escalating cost of caring for the aged, through, for example, such factors as an increase in the size of the funds required to maintain pensions.

There is likely to be increasing pressure on what one may call the nuclear family to find ways to cope with its dependent members — the aged who are living longer, the young who are staying at school longer and

MARIE COLEMAN

Mrs. Marie Coleman, Director of the Office of Child Care, addressed the National Child Care Conference in Adelaide in June, 1980 on Government Policy on Child Care in the 1980's. The following article consists of extracts from that talk.

the disabled in respect of whom we are increasingly being encouraged by expert opinion to provide as normal as possible an environment in the community.

The emphasis of the Children's Services Program will continue to be one of assisting categories of children (and through them, their families) who are considered to be in special need because of economic circumstances, or other factors such as disability, isolation, cultural problems, and the like. We will seek the co-operation of groups already receiving funds, to ensure that this occurs.

In the 1980's the Commonwealth Government will continue to be committed to working with the community — it will continue to see its role as helping families and communities to help themselves.