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INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE CHILD — THE LAST WORDS?

Remember IYC? It was that year (1978? 1979?) that everyone said was an outstanding success, whatever success is. The United Nations established that the major objectives of the Year would be:

- “(a) To provide a framework for advocacy on behalf of children and for enhancing the awareness of the special needs of children on the part of decision-makers and the public; and
- (b) To promote recognition of the fact that programmes for children should be an integral part of economic and social development plans, with a view to achieving, in both the long-term and the short-term, sustained activities for the benefit of children at the national and international levels.”

The IYC National Committee of NGOs was appointed by the then Minister for Social Security to “assist voluntary organisations and community groups to plan and co-ordinate activities related to the celebration in 1979 of IYC.” Nineteen organisations were each invited by the Minister to nominate a national representative. The organisations were as diverse as the Association for the Welfare of Children in Hospital, the Country Women's Association, the Australian Parents' Council, the Mothers' Union of Australia, the Royal Australasian College of Physicians, and of course, the Children's Bureau of Australia.

Three publications of the IYC National Committee of NGOs have been recently distributed. The *Final*

Report of the International Year of the Child National Committee of Non-Governmental Organizations is published by the Australian Government Publishing Service. The two other volumes are reports from the National Committee's sub-committees on the *Declaration of the Rights of the Child*, and *The Child Under Threat*.

In spite of factions within the committee that often made a common mind or common action difficult to achieve, the Committee and its sub-committees worked hard. The final report documents this work, and says little of the difficulties. Any achievements of the Committee owe an enormous amount to the diligence and brilliance of the Executive Director, Helen L'Orange whose accomplishments were often in spite of the committee!

The *Final Report* contains 57 pages of Conclusions and Recommendations covering “The Child and . . .” almost anything you can think of: The Family, Community, Health and Nutrition, Recreation and Arts, etc. etc. Whether or not these are followed up or implemented remains to be seen. One section covers the subject of on-going mechanisms to sustain the momentum of IYC and continue the focus on children. Little has been heard of any initiatives for follow on from IYC, unless it was that vague little paragraph in the Prime Minister's policy speech at the time of the 1980 Federal election that referred to a national body about children. Enquiries made by the Children's Bureau for more details has been met with a “wait and see” response! ■



One of the big issues raised by the IYC National Committee of NGOs was that of the formulation of a National Policy for Children and Families. Early in 1979 the Committee saw, as a primary goal, the establishment by Government of a Working Party, consisting of a balance of community and Government representatives to conduct open consultations towards the establishment of such a national policy. Two deputations of the Committee waited on the Minister for Social Security, and one on the Prime Minister.

The Committee's *Final Report* indicates that the Australian Government (surely they mean the Commonwealth Government) had indicated that it would defer further action until after the “Towards an Australian Family Policy” Conference which was held under the auspices of the Council of Social Welfare Ministers of Australia, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea in May, 1980.

In the absence of any known further developments in this area, the National Committee's actual recommendation is worth noting:

“This Committee recommends that the best interests of the child should be the guiding principle for the national policy on children and families and that among the aims of the national policy should be the promotion of the understanding and acceptance in Australia of the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child and the identification of areas of deficient implementation of the Declaration in Australia and examination of means by which a

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full implementation could be achieved.

"This Committee recommends the establishment, by the Prime Minister, of a Working Party of at least 12 members, drawn from Commonwealth, State and Local Governments and non-Governmental organisations, for up to two years to conduct an open consultation on the matter of the formation of a National Policy for Children and Families — the personnel of the Working Party to have a majority representation from the non-Governmental sector with 50% women and to include aboriginal and ethnic representation.

"This Committee comments that the tasks of the working party include:

- (i) Collation of existing material;
- (ii) holding open consultation with all levels of the non-governmental sector and all levels of the Government (Federal, State and Local);
- (iii) receiving verbal and written submissions;
- (iv) analysis of legislative, administrative and service structures as well as an endeavour to determine the needs of children and families in Australia;
- (v) ascertaining the appropriateness of establishing a long-term nation-wide arrangement concerned with the development and monitoring of policies relating to children and families throughout Australian society;
- (vi) reporting and making recommendations on all these matters.

"This Committee further recommends that all processes,

information and the final report be available to the public." ■



And a final quote from the **Final Report**:

"Experience of the Year has shown that children are far more capable than they are often thought to be, and this Committee commends the national consultation with children, the Child-to-Child project which is under production, "Consult With Kids" and the formation of Kids' Councils/Children's Councils throughout Australia."

We don't know what happened to the other activities, but "**Consult With Kids**" was a guidebook produced by the Children's Bureau of Australia for the IYC National Committee of NGO's to promote consultation with children during (and beyond) the International Year of the Child. It was written by Vicki Bahen, Robyn Riley and Graeme Gregory, and copies are available from the office of the Children's Bureau. ■



A COUPLE OF CONFERENCES

Second National Conference — "The Special Needs of Handicapped Children in Hospital — Implications for Policy and Practice", Canberra, 3rd and 4th April, 1981.

The Australian Association for the Welfare of Children in Hospital is sponsoring this conference, which is the only one on this topic to be organised in Australia during I.Y.D.P. The conference is designed to

bring together, from all parts of Australia, as wide a cross-section of people as possible, actively involved in, or concerned for, handicapped children. Three types of hospitals will be considered — major children's referral hospitals, hospitals with paediatric wards and hospitals without a paediatric ward but which admit children. All types of handicaps will be taken into consideration — physical, intellectual, emotional and multiple. ■

Further information:

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The Australian Group for the Scientific Study of Mental Deficiency — 17th National Conference, Perth, W.A., October 5th-9th, 1981

"Beyond Normalization" is the theme for this conference, the keynote speaker being Professor Donald M. Baer, Professor of Human Development, Department of Human Development and Family Life, University of Kansas. The Conference will comprise a number of seminars and symposia covering such areas as Community Change, Team Work, Staff Training, Community living Programmes, Early Childhood Programmes and Service System Evaluation. In addition papers will be presented from a wide variety of disciplines. Those wishing to present a paper to the Conference, or make further enquiries should contact:

The A.G.S.S.O.M.D. Conference
Chairman
P.O. Box 441,
West Perth, W.A. 6005