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Printed by Bel Air Graphics
170 Bellair St. Kensington Vic.



Editorial

This is the first issue of the journal for 1981, and it is unfortunate that for the first issue in the International Year of Disabled Persons we have only one article which directly focuses on an aspect of work with children with illness or disability. I would encourage individuals who are involved in working in the area of disability to write about the issues and disabilities which they identify and encounter.

For disabled people themselves, the families of disabled children and the professionals working with these individuals, it is important that the testing of assumptions, the evaluation of programmes and the development of new knowledge is recorded.

One of the issues which is an important one facing disabled children and their families is that of the establishment of independence where the child can never be completely physically independent of a caretaker. This issue was identified by a group of women, each one being the mother of a quite severely disabled child. These women were concerned with how these could foster independence in the child when they recognised that they themselves or someone else would always have to dress, perhaps toilet and care for the physical needs of the child every day. Like any parent, they wanted to protect their child, and the usual indications that the child was moving towards greater autonomy were often not readily visible. This quite complex area of parent/child relationships and the effect on the child's physical development is one which needs to be explored further. Certainly a greater community acceptance and respect for disabled people would assist parents and children to deal with this complexity.

Another issue is the exploration of the need for an ombudsman or person in a similar role to be available to parents and residents of small or large institutions where adults or children are being cared for because of their need for a protected living environment. Even when the care giving staff is the best there is, it is still difficult for someone who is completely dependent on the staff to make themselves heard. It is not only the need for the right thing to be done, but feeling one has the power to initiate action.

The articles in this issue do address important areas relevant to the International Year of Disabled Persons, although not specifically focussed on that area. The critical need for ethical guidelines is explored by Ann Pilcher and Norm Sundberg, and they present guidelines which may support professionals in their work.

Paul Sprague's article on a radiology department within a children's hospital demonstrates that it is possible to have a warm caring approach in the provision of medical care. The article on the rights of the children gives an indication of how children see their rights. In addition, David Palmer's article on families and the army touches on a lifestyle which is often not published.

Margarita Frederico