

**Book Review Editor
Ruth Stewart**



ON THE SIDE OF THE CHILD

Author: Peter Boss.
Publishers: Fontana/Collins,
Melbourne, 1980.
Price: \$4.95. 166 pages.

With this small book, which contains a remarkable amount of information and a wide range of Australian source material, Peter Boss has unerringly filled what was once a wide void on the Australian scene — a comprehensive and objective account of the States' various approaches to the problem of child abuse over recent years.

The pressing need for such a book must have assured it a warm welcome — it must be required reading in most social work courses at least. The void was predictable — those who work in the field of child protection are unlikely to have the energy or the capacity to free themselves easily from the historical and structural context of their work places to produce such a detailed overview. The author's early background of social work in the child care field gives him a valid and useful passport to these realms; his current academic status lends distance and objectivity in what could be a sensitive area.

The accounts of the various States' programmes are carefully descriptive and factual, relying to a considerable extent on material and information furnished by the programmes themselves. While this approach does not encourage critical analysis, some would suggest it may have performed indirectly a more useful service to Australian children by providing a first national perspective, and letting readers judge for themselves.

The book will help and encourage workers in child protective services to work out their own place in the scheme of things and some new directions, and will illuminate for other professions some of the dark corners and seeming inconsistencies in this new and growing field.

The author uses case presentations to enliven and illustrate the widening parameters of child abuse today, and later links these to social theory and social policy. He traces developments in service responses throughout Australia, but regrettably omits giving some attention to the efforts made in some country areas or to the special problems of developing services in these communities. The book speculates on incidence, examines dilemmas in policies and programmes and discusses treatment, prediction and prevention and mandatory reporting of child abuse.

This book is our first look back at how we are doing. On the international scene it will provide a useful backdrop against which to project the small but growing amount of Australian published material on child abuse.

It is timely also, appearing just before the Second National Australasian Conference on Child Abuse, held in Brisbane in September, 1981, where social workers, health professionals, psychologists, lawyers and others look at the inevitability of more stated practice in this most challenging of fields.

"On the Side of the Child", in content and in price, is good value.

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NURSERIES NOW—A fair deal for Parents and Children by Martin Hughes, Berry Mayall, Peter Moss, Jane Perry, Pat Petrie and Gill Pinkerton. 284 pages. Pelican Books, England, 1980 \$4.95

"Nurseries Now" combines a consumer's guide to what nurseries (also known as creches and day care centres) are available in the U.K. with a sensible critique of the gaps, anomalies and divisions in the present system of pre-school services.

While the consumer's guide will not help Australians seeking places in day care or other pre-school services, most of the book is extremely interesting and locally relevant and provides an excellent framework for examining our own services more critically.

The six authors are teachers, psychologists and researchers in the area of pre-school education. The fact that four of the six are also parents shines through the entire book very clearly. They show remarkable insight into the realities of caring for young children while at the same time exploring carefully the vitally important wider issues affecting child care in society today.

Nurseries Now draws on many sources—mothers' views, recent research, international comparisons and examples of day care centres where parents and staff are trying out new approaches. The authors emphasise the importance of setting standards of high quality day care, co-ordination and integration of all pre-school services, equal work opportunities for parents, more humane and imaginative paternity, maternity and sick leave provisions, greater choice and involvement of parents in child care, greater involvement of men in their children's upbringing and a special emphasis on political and economic factors affecting child care.

Popular myths about child care are



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challenged and refuted. Comprehensive and convincing replies are found for seven common objections to day care:

—“We didn’t need nurseries in my day.”

—“You can’t let parents decide when to use nurseries.”

—“Wouldn’t it be better to pay mothers to stay at home?”

—“Mothers shouldn’t go out to work when so many men are unemployed.”

—“Aren’t there other ways of sharing the burden of child-rearing?”

—“Nurseries alone won’t solve mothers’ problems.”

The idea of parents leaving children under five at a creche makes many people emotional and moralistic. The evidence presented in replying to these common objections would allay many fears, doubts and guilt experienced by parents who use day-care in order to work, to gain temporary relief from full-time child-rearing or to provide extra play and social learning experiences for their children.

The authors explain that mothers average a 77 hour working week plus on call. While many mothers find great fulfilment in full-time mothering, most find it difficult if not impossible to meet all their children’s needs for play, exploration and companionship nor could children meet all their mother’s social and emotional needs. There is in fact overwhelming evidence that mothers want and need some form of day care whether it be formal or informal, occasional, part-time or full-time and it is needed for many other reasons than simply returning to work. Unfortunately, in Victoria today, there is still very little choice or flexibility in day care to meet parents’ diverse needs. Too often, day care is an all or nothing proposition offering full-time day care or none at all. While occasional and part-time care is often requested it is a less economic and administratively messier proposition.

The many child-care co-operatives and neighbourhood houses which have

been set up and administered by parents throughout Victoria over the past five years have been an enormous success. These Victorian centres offer a range of child-care services at a reasonable cost and many have become community centres offering a range of social and educational activities for the whole family. They are actually cited in *Nurseries Now* as an example of the new approach to child-care in which staff and parents work together, sharing responsibilities and knowledge.

A child-care “co-op” can become an important resource centre and meeting place for local families offering opportunities for support and friendship not always available from the extended family.

The positive benefits of day care are also discussed. Children who attend high quality day care centres often show less fear of strangers and new situations and more advanced language development than children who spend most of their pre-school life at home with their mothers. Although day care children are usually less dependent on their parents and may spend large amounts of time with child care workers, the bond with their parents is not diminished.

Detailed studies of normal young children do not confirm Bowlby’s belief that children are harmed by attachments to a number of people or by interruptions in their care (p.49). It is time we realised that while “the arrangement of mother at home full-time and father at work full-time may suit some families, for others it is the root of much friction and unhappiness.” (p.8)

In fact, many fathers make better mothers than their wives. A recent Scottish study showed that although children spend most of their time with their mother, a significant number of children had the strongest attachment to their father.

Unfortunately, most men work the longest hours of their whole working

lives when they have young children. A double standard of parental responsibility still applies to men and women when men are not expected to choose between home and career and parental responsibility is not equated with providing constant and continuous child care while maternal responsibility is.

If the concept of mutual parental responsibilities gained acceptance in our society, more flexibility in working hours would follow. Men often feel excluded from the early stages of their children’s development and would like to participate more while many women would like to participate less. Unfortunately, work tends to be adapted to individuals, not families.

Insights into the economic and political issues affecting day care are also given. Mothers caring for children at home are powerless in both an economic and political sense and child care workers are grossly underpaid.

It would be uneconomic for Government to introduce adequate and therefore more costly employment and child care measures for mothers’ benefit. (p.145)

The least costly provision of child care by private minders in their own homes is carefully examined and the authors present rather alarming findings. Quality of care is not easily controlled or measured and abuses are common in the U.K.

Fascinating examples of political expediency in the provision of child-care services in the U.K. are given. “During World War II the urgent need for women workers led to a rapid increase in day nurseries, from 194 in 1941 to 1450 three years later. After the war the importance of married women in the economy rapidly diminished and to this day have not returned to pre-war levels although the demand persisted.

In the 1960s when the State needed more nurses and teachers these women (whose training involved substantial



public investment) were encouraged to use day nurseries and go back to work. For the others, the doctrine of maternal deprivation was called on to justify the lack of day care and the need for them to stay at home with their children.

The more enlightened provisions implemented in Sweden make impressive reading. There is one ministry in Sweden for all pre-school services. (In Victoria Federal, State and municipal bodies share these responsibilities.) Recent legislation gave all Swedish parents the right to a 6 hour working day until a child is 8 years old or full leave of absence until a child is 18 months. This leave may be shared by two parents. While a child is under 10 either parent is entitled to 12 days leave a year (15 days for two children) for the illness of a child or non-working parent. The aim is to provide nurseries for all working parents by 1986.

The rich, it is explained, have always been able to "buy help to protect themselves from the realities of child care, and many still do". There is the example of Lady Russell, who in 1977 took a rest cure in a health hydro at £120 a week. "I have had such a tiring time since the birth of my daughter, Czarina, last year. Two months ago both my nanny and the Filipino couple I had, left me. As a result I had to do everything on my own. Imagine going shopping taking a child with you in a pushchair. And everytime you go out in the car you have all the business of fixing the safety harness. By 6.30 in the evening I was finished . . . When I get home I hope to get another couple, and in the meantime, my father-in-law's valet is going to help in the house." (p.74)

For the rest of us, however, "bringing up young children carries with it a heavy burden of work and responsibility; which in our society is borne almost exclusively by mothers. It extracts from many of them a heavy toll—physically, psychologically and economically. The case for day centres at its most basic is that they provide one means of sharing

this heavy burden so reducing the overload on women and its damaging consequences."

For those who would like to see responsibilities for home and children shared more equally between men and women and the rest of society, this book offers practical hope.

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Two replies to 'Annie's Coming Out'

**From Sue Jones
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J.M. Houston's review of "Annie's Coming Out" (in *Australian Child and Family Welfare Journal*, Winter, 1981) itself calls for further review. Your readers should be made aware that it contains many disputed and disputable statements of both fact and interpretation, while raising vital issues.

In this critique six of the disputed factual statements will be addressed, mainly with the use of information from the book, which could be substantiated from other sources. The present writer has not had access to the Supreme Court records of the hearing in May and September, 1979, or recent access to the Report of the Committee of Inquiry to Investigate Claims About Children at St Nicholas' Hospital (S.N.H.), April, 1980.

Anne McDonald identifies herself and is identified in the book (page 1) as suffering from the athetoid form of cerebral palsy or athetosis, not bilateral hemiplegia and athetosis as stated in the review (paragraph 1). This matter was the subject of considerable medical dispute (see book pp.210-11 and 214, and presumably the Court records), and is most relevant because of the different prognostic implications.

The statement in paragraph 3 "Miss Crossley believes that she (Miss McDonald) is able to communicate with

her with the aid of an alphabet board" is not disputed, but is regarded as a significant understatement. Anne's communication abilities, including her use of the alphabet board, are recognised clearly by a far wider circle including a Master of the Supreme Court (Sept., 1979). This second Court hearing and associated investigation certainly did produce further evidence of Anne's ability to communicate independently, in contrast to the reviewer's statement (paragraph 17). This is described in the book (pp.238-42). The investigation included, eventually, a briefly controlled "test" with the alphabet board. The letter R is on the opposite side to S and T, and there was no piece of string to glance at.

It is inaccurate to claim that Miss Crossley, through Miss McDonald's lawyers, refused Mr Justice Jenkinson's attempt to organise a controlled test during the first Supreme Court hearing (para. 12). Her barrister withdrew from the arrangements after becoming aware of potential delay and an additional requirement that Miss Crossley wear a blindfold, which would have made the test situation untenable (p.223).

With regard to the abrupt restrictions imposed on non-relative visiting at S.N.H. in early 1979 (para. 21), the phrase "in danger of becoming a circus attraction" is considered a misrepresentation of responsible actions by previously welcome visitors trying to maintain contact with resident friends, including those of adult age. These restrictions are still in force. The concern and interests of the parents involved could have been more effectively faced by the hospital administration. Restrictions in visiting at S.N.H. are discussed at some length in the Supplementary Report to the Committee of Inquiry to Investigate Claims about Children at St Nicholas' Hospital, August 1981, by Robert Cummins and Heather Bancroft (pp. 167-186).

Still with regard to visiting, the