

book reviews . .

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“COUNCILS - KIDS AND COUNSELLORS”

IN THE CARE OF THE COUNCIL: SOCIAL WORKERS AND THEIR WORLD — John Stroud. Gollancz Ltd. 1975. pp 184. \$11.45.

The title of this book aptly conveys the author's purpose in writing it, namely as he states in the introduction, to describe what “social workers do”. Consequently it is intended primarily as a guidebook for those not directly working in the welfare field and more specifically for those potentially interested in becoming social workers.

“In the Care of the Council” is the twelfth book John Stroud has written since his first book, “The Shorn Lamb”, was published in 1960. In his latest book, the author confines himself to discussing the role of the social worker employed by the Local Authority (or Council) in the United Kingdom and indeed he is most suitably qualified to do so as the Assistant Director of Social Services for the Hertfordshire County Council. Much of his earlier writings have been concerned with services for children and his chapters on child care in this particular book, will be of interest to anyone who is considering working with the young. Understandably some of the material is of limited relevance to the local scene and certainly much of the text provides few fresh insights for those already established in careers in child welfare. Stroud devotes whole chapters to the “Under Fives”, adoption, fostering and adolescence and titles this last, somewhat romantically, “The Torrents of Spring”. He discusses in detail the responsibility of Council social workers for trying to keep young children out of residential care by providing alternative supportive services and comments that ironically this concentration on the younger age group, appears to explain in part at least, the increased numbers of older children coming into care in Britain today.

The chapter on adoption unfortunately touches only fleetingly on the issues pertaining to the adoption of older children or those with

physical or emotional handicaps but dwells almost pedantically on every conceivable aspect of the “traditional” adoption process. One feels this chapter, with its wealth of detail, is possibly a bit overwhelming for the introductory reader. The subject of fostering is treated more broadly and in this chapter, the writer mourns the loss or at least decline of the long-term relationship between foster parent and social worker. He sees our highly mobile modern society as the culprit but the point he makes about a client learning to gradually withhold trust from a seemingly endless succession of social workers, has most valid and distressing implications.

John Stroud has written this book from a personal viewpoint with warmth and wit. He even manages to convey his feeling for his subject matter in his choice of chapter titles. From the other side of the globe it is not easy to assess how accurately he depicts the role of the Council social worker in England but his appraisal is frequently critical not only of existing social service statutes and machinery but of the actual service provided by social workers themselves. He does not shy away from discussing the more knotty ethical problems encountered in some areas of welfare work either. The book gives a detailed and lucid account of the organization of Social Services in the UK and for this reason would provide excellent introductory reading for anyone contemplating working in Britain in the near future.

An extensive bibliography is provided too. “In the Care of the Council” is probably of limited interest to those who are already social workers or who are working in the field of child care but for those who are not, it very ably describes what “social worker's do”.

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