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At a recent Social Policy Conference in Canberra (May 1982—Social Policy in the 1980s) a speaker commented that “the 1960s was the decade of the Social Worker, the 1970s the decade of the Economist and the 1980s will be the decade of the Auditor!”

With increasing demands from their growing number of clients for financial assistance, many family welfare agencies are finding themselves in the paradoxical position of facing financial cutbacks whilst the demand for services grows. Also, many agencies are finding it necessary to put more financial resources into justifying their existence and obtaining appropriate financial grants. Few people would question the need for agencies to be accountable, but there is a danger that some effective programmes for low income families will fail to get funding because they cannot demonstrate effectiveness with hard data, or alternatively the focus to produce the necessary hard data will mean the programme will undergo changes which will affect its effectiveness.

Family welfare agencies are facing challenges with respect to the worsening economic situation (and hence more people seeking support services) whilst experiencing a cut-back of funds and challenges with respect to obtaining appropriate measures for evaluation and accountability.

In this issue we address one aspect of family support services, that of financial counselling. This area of counselling, which has been developing in the welfare field since the 1960s, has only more recently been recognised as an important aspect of family support services. The article by Andrew Jones traces the development of financial counselling in Australia, and presents an analysis of credit and debt counselling. The author also links this aspect of counselling to the network of support services required by families in the 1980s.

With changes in economic circumstances, however, the major issues facing family and child welfare workers change only in order of concern. The area of adoption, aspects of which are also addressed in this issue, usually evokes strong emotions from all involved. The papers in this issue include an account from an adoptive mother, Irene Robinson, of her experience of fostering. In another paper J. Kraus reviews literature regarding the development of the “only child” and relates this to criteria for adoption.

The difficult (and topical) area of the welfare of children whose mothers are in prison is addressed in an article by Dennis Challinger. He explores issues relating to the development of the children and their relationship with their mothers. Whilst this topic is being explored, perhaps we also need to address attention to these children's relationship with their fathers (whether in prison or not) and their role in the child's development.

Finally, we present a report of the A.C.T. Consultative Committee on after school and holiday programmes.

Margarita Frederico