

In all of this we are reminded that having lived through such major social and economic changes older people have much to tell us of their reactions to and knowledge of social change. Our own capacity to cope with the next round of changes could well be positively influenced by our learning from 'our elders' about the nature of their coping mechanisms.

It is this identification with older people that perhaps represents the core of this useful book. By using the term 'our elders' the authors imply that when we confront older people we are essentially talking about a continuum that links all stages of the life cycle. If we seek to relegate the older members of our society to some discrete sub category with special needs and special services then we create a separation process that ultimately leads to stigmatisation, isolation and despair. By identifying older people as ourselves grown old we place ourselves as well as them on a continuum.

As the authors say:

"although older people have a right to set their own standards there is little to suggest that they are different from young people, that they would not enjoy better living conditions and a higher income if it were possible to attain them, or that they should not be encouraged to strive for a better deal from society" p. 55.

For the reader in search of information there are good detailed chapters on the physical aspects of ageing, confusion, incontinence and the problems of communication and medication. Service providers will find many valuable examples of caring systems to ponder upon in measuring the effectiveness of their own programmes. A good example of this is the comment regarding whether or not people should be kept in bed.

"It is clear that bed is a bad place to be! This is particularly so, when one remembers that most people die in bed. It is for this reason that we attempt to limit the amount of time our elders have to spend in bed because of illness."

Overall, the authors approach their task in a realistic way. Since neither more money nor helpers will be available in the future they examine the question of older people in all its facets with regard to their special physical, emotional and social needs. They seek to awaken a deeper understanding and awareness among society in general and to find possible new ways of helping this growing population segment in all communities. They clearly have an awareness of the wide reader potential for this book in



that they translate each technical term into laymans language. This places Our Elders within the reach and comprehension of most readers who would benefit much from its perusal.

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YOUNG PEOPLE IN CARE SPEAK OUT.

Compiled by: S. Low,
P. McPaul, M. O'Brien.

Published by New South Wales Association of Child Caring Agencies.
(Copies obtainable — P.O. Box 2244, North Parramatta, New South Wales. 2151). 62 pages

Project Speakout was a camp held for children in New South Wales in 1979. One hundred secondary school children who were living in institutional care at that time met for a weekend and discussed the way they viewed the care provided to them. This publication is a record of the comments of what the children felt and believed.

The organisers of the Project hoped that the shared experience of life in care would help the children consider positive alternatives to any common difficulties discussed.

This publication is a refreshing change from the plethora of material written by professionals and for professionals working in the child care field.

It goes some small way to redress the balance. A description of the historical and legislative background of institutional care is presented but generally the authors have let the children speak for themselves

The children's comments are divided into subject areas to provide some harmony to the document. These subject areas appear to be most relevant to children who are experiencing institutional care. The topics range from broad areas such as "Coming into Care" and

"Families" to personal topics such as "Privacy" and "Who to talk to". Once again a concise introductory remark by the compilers of the report gives a background to the particular topic.

One section is devoted to Bill's story — a poignant story of the child's experience of separation from his mother, the memory he tried to retain of her and the lack of preparation he had for his numerous foster placements.

Another section is a play written and produced by a group of participant teenagers. It is a tongue in cheek presentation of foster parents applying for a child. The message of the play is to try to educate the general public about the feelings of children in care.

The material presented is a reflection of the way in which institutional care in New South Wales is experienced by the children. There may be some subtle variations to the experiences of institutional care in other states.

It may be helpful to point out that the use of foster care in New South Wales varies from other States. Commenting on the topic of "Foster Care" the compilers noted that many of the children who contributed to the document had experienced foster care, some several times, and some had spent most of their lives in foster care.

There was considerable evidence presented in the report which ran counter to the modern philosophy of foster care. Contact with families — certainly knowledge of them — would seem to be an integral part of a foster care programme. Yet most of the children at the camp had minimal or no contact with their families.

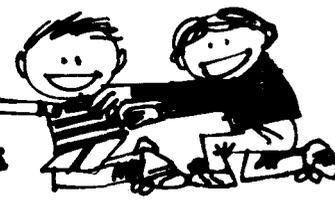
It is useful to keep this perspective in mind when reading the comments of the children.

The main body of this report deals with the individual, his feelings and emotions, and attitudes to various aspects of institutional care. It is a report about self respect and a person's sense of dignity.

The report illustrates clearly the phenomena that when a person's basic needs are processed according to a system, there develops a distinct lack of sense of individuality and even self respect in the individual.

There are many quotes from the

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children lamenting this loss of individuality to the process of the system.

" you just stand there like a vegetable and let everybody else decide and play God".

" I said that I'd like to know about my parents and they got us all in a room — there were about twenty of us all lined up — and they all came out one at a time crying and they told us about our parents"

These are typical themes of anger directed towards those who are perceived — perhaps unjustly — to have denied the individual his rights.

In this respect the document highlights the dilemma of those who are closely involved with children in care. The "truth" of adults is sometimes differently perceived to the "truth" of children in care.

"They don't care what happens to you, they're just doing it for the money. That's all they're worried about".

"This place we visited had social work students hangin' around who seemed to be just using the kids for their experience — it wasn't fair to the kids."

The teenagers had summed up the goal they hoped to achieve in the following way:

" that kids in care are the same as any other kids from a normal family or a stable family situation."

If the documents purpose is to have an impact on its audience so that the reader (public) will re-think his attitude to kids in care, then overall it appears to have succeeded.

One is left perhaps with a lingering doubt and the question could be asked "What of the children who do not have the skill to articulate their feelings?" One wonders if this report speaks also for them the children who because of the loss of their home life have turned their sadness and anger in on themselves.

— Carolyn Pearl, Social Worker, Victorian Children's Aid Society, Black Rock, Victoria.

PARENTING AFTER SEPARATION ~ ALTERNATIVE PATTERNS OF CHILD CARE

Editor: Ilene Wolcott

Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne. Published (1982) and Distributed by the Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University, P.O. Box 4, A.C.T. 2600. Price: \$12.50

Shared parenting after separation and divorce is a recent phenomenon in Australia. Such arrangements may have existed in the past for individual families, but it is only recently that a discernible trend has become noticeable.

Thus reads the introduction to a compendium of reports and proceedings of a National Conference on parenting after separation conducted in Canberra, in 1981, by the Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University and the Institute of Family Studies, located in Melbourne.

This unique conference grew out of a wish to share the various cooperative parenting arrangements which belie the dominant norm among separated parents, namely the mother having prime care and responsibility for the children and the father having access. (Note: Access is not parenting!) Since alternative arrangements generally are negotiated privately and cooperatively, they rarely come to the attention of the courts, census enquiries, or the public. Hence the conference was designed to identify and document such alternatives. It also explored the issues which impact on parents and children after separation.

Reflecting these themes through the edited papers as well as the reports of the eight workshops, including one for children, the book is a rich compendium of knowledge and information. Section titles indicate the range of topics: Beyond Custody and Access; The Legal Perspective; Community Supports; Child Care and Schools; Child Development and the Impact of Separation; Creative Responses to Parenting After Separation; Constructive Management of Conflict; Life Reconstruction After Separation; and the Children's Workshop.

Dorothy Broom Darrock's sociological

approach to separation and divorce highlights, in a well written article, some of the difficulties, problems and obstacles to cooperative parenting. For instance, the prevailing network of norms and beliefs still surrounding our definition of family, namely two married adults plus their dependent children, means that every parent is "supposed to be" a spouse and every spouse a parent. The two roles are so closely intertwined that those who try to disentangle them are seen as violating social norms, and are often castigated. Yet separation of these two roles, she believes, is crucial for cooperative parenting. Written primarily from a parental point of view, Darrock's central theme that marital separation need not become family breakdown includes practical suggestions and storm warnings. This is thought provoking material.

In another article, one of several cooperative parenting models is described in some detail after four years experience by a parent. "Living in Close Proximity" following separation is a plan which allows children considerable personal freedom of access to both parents as opposed to the often complicated, arduous, and expensive transportation which of necessity is arranged by adults. It also enables children to maintain greater continuity with their parents as well as their friends, school and neighbourhood. Interpersonal attitudes and factors which promote the success of this model are candidly explored.

Another author who discusses the fathers role in shared parenting develops the concept that access is not parenting. Kenneth Berry, who sees the Californian system known as Joint Physical Custody as a desirable model describes its pros and cons. It has been operating with apparently few problems and substantial benefits for over 3 years. A photocopy of a brochure on the Joint Custody scheme which is distributed by the L.A. Superior Court systems to each parent filing for divorce is included.

In sum, this book reflects an unusual conference about a growing social problem in Australia, that is, child care following parental separation. Attended by a group of individuals determined to be effective parents regardless of marital status, the book takes a refreshing stance in its approach to alternative patterns of child care. It is optimistic, it is also practical. The book should be a rich source to helping professionals, the relevant courts, as well as separated parents or those contemplating separation.

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