

REVIEWS



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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