

Book Review Editor
Ruth Stewart



LAW FOR SOCIAL WELFARE WORKERS

(205 pages) and

LAW FOR YOUTH WORKERS

(139 pages)

by Margaret White, George Allen & Unwin
Australia, May, 1983, Sydney, N.S.W.,
hardback \$19.95, paperback \$9.95

Reviewed by: Ron Tiffen,
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The books are products of the Community Legal Education for Welfare Project of the Law Foundation of New South Wales.

The aim in producing the books is two-fold. First, the material is meant to assist welfare and youth workers to cope with the legal problems they face in their work. The information is practical in nature and said to be based on the role of welfare workers and youth workers. Second, the books are designed as training manuals to allow the education process to be continued independently from the Project (of the Law Foundation). To this end, there is a chapter in each book which provides a guide to running a legal workshop. Each subject chapter in both books has a revision section with questions and answers relating to the particular subject of the chapter. There is also information as to available resources and sources of more information for each subject area. The final section in each book contains a useful listing of legal terms with their definitions.

The most pleasing aspect of the books is that legal matters are explained simply and clearly and the subject matter is not confined to points of law, but includes descriptions of legal processes and procedures. Where precise answers to problems cannot be provided, then the legal principles and precedents that apply to the problem are indicated.

The writing style is such that the text flows and the easy integration of statute and case law is impressive.

Prior legal study is not required by the reader in order to keep-up with the text.

There is a good deal of content overlap between the two books, as they deal with the areas of family law, domestic violence and child welfare. There is, however, a fundamental difference between the approach taken in the two books. In *Law for Welfare Workers*, the subject matter is confined to legal problems that clients could bring to a welfare worker. The seven subjects are:

- The family
- Domestic violence
- Credit and debt
- Neighbour disputes
- Workers' compensation
- Landlord and tenant
- Crime

In *Law for Youth Workers* there are six subject chapters. They are:

- Young people and crime.
- Young people and the police.
- Children in the family.
- Children in need of care.
- Rights and responsibilities of youth workers.
- Legal aid for children.

An important difference in approach between the two books is that in *Law for Youth Workers*, the workers' obligations and responsibilities receive far more attention. Indeed, it was difficult to get a sense of the 'welfare worker' as having a substantive role in legal matters. It was more difficult to understand the basis of the distinction between welfare workers and youth workers. It occurred to me that the volumes have much in them for the whole field of human services, and they could well be marketed to a broader audience or at least avoid the separate tags of youth worker and welfare worker. Such matters are a thing of choice and are not intended as a criticism.

Criticism must be levelled at the deficiencies in the material. Generally, the information becomes a little loose or vague when the author attempts to deal with welfare practice issues and welfare rights. For example, in *Law for Welfare Workers* at page 179 in a section on helping prisoners and their families, it is stated that —

'The wife or de facto wife of a man who is imprisoned for more than six months may be eligible for a widow's pension.'

The entry fails to mention assistance for children and the fact that the family may be assisted when the man is remanded (Special Benefits) and immediately on sentence (Supporting Parent Benefit) before receiving a widow's pension which may be available six months after sentencing.

In an area as important as income maintenance, such partial treatment of the subject may be misleading.

Another area that could have been more fully dealt with was that of the responsibilities and dilemmas of the welfare worker

when making a report to the Court. The impression is given that the solicitor or barrister involved in the case could have a dominant say in how the worker will present at Court, that is, whether the worker appears as a character witness or expert witness. The status of the report is not adequately dealt with.

In summary, there are two general limitations to the books. First, the lack of detail in a few areas probably means that the material should be worked through in a well managed workshop. Second, the Project was created in New South Wales and is geared to assist workers in that State, and so in each State the information would need to be checked for consistency and compatibility.

Overall, the volumes are well presented and contain much in the way of detailed information of law and the legal process. The educative approach inherent in the organisation of the volumes is an encouraging trend and it should be followed-through in New South Wales and other States.

PREMATURE BABIES:

A GUIDE TO PARENTS.

by W.H. Kitchen, M.M. Ryan, A.L. Rickards, J.V. Lissenden.
Hill of Content, Melbourne, Australia, 1983.

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This recently-published guide to parents of premature babies, by a team of professionals — a Pediatrician, Social Worker, Psychologist and Nurse-Midwife, is a much-needed handbook. So often these parents are shocked and confused, and find the baby-care nursery an alien and frightening place. This easy-to-read, light-weight book enables parents to read and digest quietly, at their own pace.

The four authors thoughtfully and sensitively explain technical words and procedures, possible difficulties for premature babies and their families, also various questions which are typically asked by parents. They rightfully claim that the information contained in the book is not meant as a substitute for face-to-face discussion with the medical team, but hope that the book will facilitate communication.

This paperback is clearly set out under various headings, covering: Why is our baby small? Will my baby live? Difficulties that premature babies may have, breast feeding, parent's feelings after the birth of a