

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,
Student Unit Supervisor,
Office of Research and Social Policy,
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Services, Victoria.

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.

Reviewed by: Joy Rainey,
Senior Social Worker,
Southern Family Life Service Association.

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



premature baby, family and friends: how can they help? Your premature baby comes home at last, advice when the chances of survival are low, follow-up visits to the pediatrician, multiple births, the next pregnancy. At the back is a glossary of technical terms and on the final page, books recommended for further reading.

Throughout the book are pictures, including a particularly touching one of a very small baby attached to tubes and monitor, with her father's wedding ring around her tiny wrist. These pictures and explanations of the types of equipment should enable parents to be more informed and less anxious.

Reasons are also given for the use of various equipment. For example, incubators and breathing difficulties are discussed in detail. While the authors are largely optimistic about outcomes, they do not appear to be unrealistically so, stating, for instance, when discussing babies on ventilators, that 'it must be admitted that a few do not survive' (p.21).

However, there are some additions which I believe would have improved the practicability of this book. The conclusion could have been extended to include a list of facilities available to parents. Nursing Mothers' Association was mentioned in the text but for the anxious and searching parent, a list, including this resource and other appropriate ones, would be easier to locate.

While, admittedly, there are some references to the issue of support for mothers, this has not been comprehensively addressed. For example, there is mention of the importance of a mother delivering breast milk twice daily to the hospital. What can the mother do if she is too tired and cannot deliver this to the hospital for various reasons? Also, what can she do with other small children she may have in tow when she visits her infant?

There is an overriding emphasis on the mothers' responsibilities and, while I recognize there are some obvious functions the father cannot do, there are others which he can do which are not specified. There are comments concerning the importance of a supportive partner, but few specific guidelines. Some fathers, particularly first-time, feel frustrated in not knowing how to help, and some simple hints would assist.

The importance of emotional and practical support for mothers (and parents) cannot be under-estimated. As many of us are aware, throughout the child abuse literature it is evident that one of the main

variables involved is lack of support. Also it has been shown that premature babies are particularly vulnerable for child abuse. The problem of inadequate bonding is being increasingly addressed and the writers of this book are aware of this, encouraging the mothers to have physical contact with their premature infants, even in the intensive care nursery. However, the area of support for mothers throughout our community is still insufficiently addressed; in my experience, new mothers typically express feelings of being insufficiently supported, both by community and family (often spouses). It therefore behoves us to address this area, whenever we have the opportunity.

Overall, I would recommend this book as a helpful contribution, both for parents of premature babies, also for those working in the helping professions, who may wish to increase their knowledge in this area.



ARTHRITIS IN CHILDREN, A Practical Guide.

by Barbara Horgan. Illustrations by Anna Warren.

Fontana/Collins, Melbourne 1982. 240 pages, recommended price \$5.95.

Reviewed by: Joan Ozanne Smith, Medical Officer, M.C.A.E.: Institute of Early Childhood Development, Kew.

In view of Barbara Horgan's involvement as a parent of a child with arthritis, her practical guide to arthritis in children is a surprisingly and refreshingly objective account.

She provides usefully detailed, accurate and up-to-date information about the nature of juvenile arthritis, and the types of the disease, together with their management. In particular, she devotes careful attention to explanations of medical terms with the aid of illustrations. This information about arthritis is directed particularly to parents, children with arthritis, teachers, health professionals and others associated with the disease. However, this account is unlikely to appeal to a wider audience, because of its specialized nature.

Although initially rather clinical in its approach to the disease, the book is later clearly seen to be written with empathy, and the understanding of experience.

This book is not a diary of one family's experiences of arthritis in childhood, nor is it in any sense emotive. Rather, it looks at issues confronting such families based on knowledge of the disease and the experiences of hundreds of families with an arthritic child, who were surveyed by the author in 1979. It examines the range of choices which are practically available in Australia to these families. The issues discussed range from hospitalization and dealing co-operatively with health personnel, to education, family life and sexuality. This discussion is well referenced, particularly with regard to resources available to children with arthritis and their families. These resources are usefully collated into a directory of services at the end of the book.

Whilst adequate in most areas, this account provides little information about the financial burden of the disease, particularly the hidden costs of chronic illness. When the child is hospitalized travelling expenses, baby sitting costs for other children in the family, and the cost of meals away from home are significant. More important, however, is the fact that one parent is virtually excluded from the work-force by the requirement of being available when the child is unwell.

Another significant omission is the failure to deal adequately with the prognosis of arthritis in children. This is too important a question to be glossed over in such an account, particularly since considerable reassurance could be given.

References to Barbara Horgan's son Benjamin who contracted juvenile arthritis ten years ago, when aged almost three years, are discreet. They serve only to illustrate practical points, and to remind the reader of the author's close personal connection with the disease.