



EDITORIAL

In this issue we again explore the frightening and complex area of child abuse. The area of child welfare is one in which, despite apparent window dressing prevention and intervention policies and services are minimal.

The need for clear policy guidelines and the need for adequate resources for families are areas the journal has addressed previously. It should be of great concern to our community that Governments are reluctant to commit adequate financing for services which directly aid children and families.

The fact of adequate funding, however, should not be used as an excuse to avoid acknowledging the importance of the knowledge and skill of the care-givers themselves in relating to provision of services to children and families.

Provision of adequate services is certainly dependent on funding. It is also dependent on the competence of the individuals and/or team providing the service. It should be recognised that the lack of adequate services puts stress on people already working in an extremely stressful area. Effective programs in child abuse normally require a team approach, and the efficient working of the team may be impeded by the stress on the individual members.

However, as the article by Dot Shamley, Lisa Kingston and M. Smith demonstrates, the knowledge and attitudes of caregivers in the field tends to vary among professional groups quite dramatically. It is of concern that many individuals working in the area are not, for example, familiar with the relevant Government Act. As the authors suggest in their conclusion, there is an obvious need for more education for the caregivers. The article is a timely reminder that caregivers, too, need support and education. In addition, there is a need for the protection of standards of care, and caregivers must be accountable to the community and the families with whom they work.

In another article in this issue, Anthony Maluccio writes on developing competence in practice. His article focuses on social workers in child welfare, however, the majority of concepts and issues discussed can be seen to be relevant to all child welfare practitioners. The need to develop accepted standards, to monitor those standards and to provide education and support to assist caregivers maintain those standards have become a primary concern. Because there are not generally accepted standards and at the moment accountability tends to be looked at one a case by case basis. This neither assists nor protects families, children or caregivers. Good practice can be questioned because some individuals can disagree with an outcome. Poor practice can masquerade as good if the outcome is accepted by individuals who themselves may have strong vested interests.

That is why in setting standards and procedures for accountability it is important for all these complex issues to be addressed. Otherwise no-one will benefit.

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