



Guest Editorial — Lloyd Owen

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International Youth Year 1985 is nearing its end in time. As with other international years the hope is that consciousness has been raised and that the energy of society as a whole has been mobilised with a fresh focus on issues relating to young people. It is also hoped that positive initiatives will gather momentum over time and deliver a better deal and more positive opportunities in which young people can participate.

This writer's perspective tends to be coloured by close acquaintance with the trouble young people get into. It is clearly apparent that the usual troubles of growing up are being compounded in many instances by factors like the employment market and an all too ready access to lifestyle traps such as tobacco, alcohol and drugs. Competition for educational attainment and desirable job opportunities are reflected in self-defeating, self-destructive activities and significant prevalence of suicide among your people. It is surprising, however, that in spite of these factors only a relatively small proportion of young people appear in the residual public welfare and correctional systems. The majority are finding ways to cope with these stresses and strains probably with the caring back-up of families, educational institutions, employers, income support avenues, friends, and the many agencies involved with them. Nevertheless, it is clear that the community cannot afford to be complacent or apathetic about these issues.

The Australian Government published "The Commonwealth Government's Strategy for young People" in the form of a Prime Ministerial statement in August 1985. Focussing on the post compulsory school age group in the population in the 15 to 24 age range. Attention is drawn to the primary concern of youth unemployment.

"Close to 60%, or 1.5 million, of these young people are employed. Of this group, 400,000 are also

participating in some form of education. About 520,000 other young people not in the labour force are pursuing full-time education. While in the great majority are making good progress in moving from childhood through adolescence to independent adulthood, too many of them are unemployed. At June 1985, about 135,000 young men and 95,000 young women, or 9% of all young people were officially recorded as unemployed and seeking full-time work. They were spending, on average, from 30 to 50 weeks out of work. Another 40,000 young people were unemployed and looking for part-time employment."

Following a study on youth policies by an invited OECD team and the Kirby Committee of Inquiry into Labour Market Programs and the Karmel Quality of Education Review Committee, the present effort is pitched at improving access to employment, education and training. Practical initiatives have commenced with the traineeship system which targets at present 16 and 17 year olds. The challenge for welfare practitioners will be to keep abreast of developments and to negotiate access for their clients.

The implementation of its present focus has been titled "Priority One" and in its strategy the Commonwealth Government has also indicated a commitment to support services directed at the personal needs and problems of the young and income support. At the same time it has expressed a need for integration of programs and activities for young people and the linking of policies in the three broad areas of action to ensure that they are mutually supportive. The Office of Youth Affairs, located in the Prime Minister's Department has carriage of the strategy of achieving a sense of unity and direction.