

# UNDERSTANDING LIBERAL WELFARE POLICY

The 1975 Policy of the Liberal and National Country Parties states "Our desire to give power and responsibility back to individuals and groups in order to effectively meet the requirements of social welfare, distinguishes our policy from alternative approaches."

"We believe that individual group and government participation and consultation is necessary for the planning and implementation of a co-ordinated and effective social welfare policy. It is through the efforts of individuals and groups in co-operation with government, that diversity and choice, innovation, and the spirit of voluntary association and self-help enhance human growth and development."

There exists however, a very difficult task in successfully bridging the gap between clearly stated policy aims and actual achievement. The field of child-care, no less than other areas of social welfare, still has a number of battles to win before the desired consultation and co-operation between voluntary associations and government is achieved. A genuine diversity of services offering choice to people, should be the minimum target set in our social welfare planning.

Clearly we have seen over the past 20 years or so, a number of significant changes in service delivery, and methods of care through welfare services. Governments in Australia have been assuming a more dominant role, not only in funding support but in direct service provision.

This factor has introduced one of the most challenging problems in social welfare programmes today — are the government bureaucracies capable of giving genuine support to community planning and funding of new initiatives being undertaken in the non-government sector? Indeed,



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are the bureaucracies — government or otherwise, more concerned with empire-building than with creating sensitive, imaginative and diverse responses to meet the needs of people in crisis?

Establishment of working guidelines which recognise and take into account, both the strengths and the weaknesses of bureaucratic structures, and the power of government departments, is essential immediately, for the results of an improved range of alternative services available to people in our communities, is a necessary goal.

Not only should we demonstrate our belief in the innate right of people to exercise independent judgement in solving their problems, but we must also calculate the immense cost savings to the community through development of low cost solutions to difficult problems.

During the past 4 or 5 years in particular, we have begun to see the overall benefits to the community, in both personal and economic terms, of having available a greater

range of child-care services.

To the traditional approaches of institutional and group care for children, and the various limited counselling and/or guidance services for parents and children, have been added new services especially by self-help organisations and local government authorities. State Government initiatives in regionalisation are also making an impact which encourages us to favourably anticipate further new developments.

We are now aware that there are fewer children each year taken into reception centres in Victoria. It seems that the increased network of local services, support by improved special benefits and pensions enabling parents to exercise a choice, is making a contribution to this excellent trend. More accessible counselling services for parents and children; better diagnostic and therapeutic resources through school services; a range of low-cost government subsidised day-care and emergency accommodation units; holiday programmes and after-school activities; community youth and recreation workers; accessible community health centres and family planning centres; all are having a significant impact on support systems and alternative systems of care for families in need.

Specialist support and referral staff available through government resources will further promote the improved network of voluntary community preventive services. Such a partnership between government and non-government services will enrich the quality of care for children provided in this State.

Can I re-iterate the point of the Liberal and National Country Party policy — "It is through the efforts of individuals and groups in co-operation with government, that diversity and choice, innovation, community participation and the spirit of voluntary association, and self-help, enhance human growth and development."