
What People are Saying and Doing...

FAMILY CONFERENCE SUCCESS

Nearly 200 child welfare practitioners from around Victoria attended the two day Intensive Family Services Conference held at Ormond College, Melbourne on the 27th and 28th of June.

The Conference was sponsored by the Children's Welfare Association of Victoria; Community Services, Victoria; the Australian Institute of Family Studies and Melbourne University. The theme of this conference was 'New directions in child welfare', and the keynote speakers were Professor Tony Maluccio, professor of Social Work at the University of Connecticut, and Dr's David Happala and Jill Kinney the co-directors of 'Homebuilders'.

Professor Maluccio is well-known for his work in the field of permanency planning, and a major focus at the conference was on his involvement in Intensive Home-based Family Services - with particular reference to how they would integrate into the range of child and family services offered in Victoria.

'Homebuilders' is a programme aimed at keeping children with their families as an alternative to being placed in substitute care. Dr's Happala and Kinney were involved in the establishment of 'Homebuilders' around twelve years ago, and have seen the staff grow from 16 to around 100. It is now developed in many states in the US, with major programmes in Washington State and New York. It claims about 90% of cases, at around 25% the cost of group care.

The conference was very successful and ended with a dinner for 180 people at Clunies Ross House.

The National Children's Bureau is planning a national conference on Intensive Family Services for 1992. Those wishing to register an interest in this conference are invited to contact Maureen Himbury at the NCBA office on (03) 558 9100.

NATIONAL CHILD PROTECTION WEEK

'Every child is special' will be the theme for this year's National Child Protection Week, August 20-26. A wide range of activities has been organised and will conclude with NAPCAN's 2nd annual meeting and conference which will be held

at the Monash Medical Centre in Melbourne on August 25th and 26th with the theme 'Parenting towards 2000'.

Enquiries to:

Dr Elizabeth McMahon, President NAPCAN
5 Winmalee Road, Balwyn, Vic. 3103

STATISTICS SHOW RISE IN THE DIVORCE RATE

The divorce rate is rising again in Australia: 41,383 marriages were formally terminated last year, leaving 43,317 children in broken families.

The number of divorces was the highest in five years. The rate of marital breakdown has risen from 10.6 divorces per 1000 families in 1987 - the lowest since the introduction of the Family Law Act - to 10.8 in 1989.

Figures released by the Bureau of Statistics yesterday showed the increase occurring across almost all age groups under 60. A rising number of people are being divorced a second time.

If these trends continue, the bureau figures show that the average Australian couple marrying today - a man of 26 and a woman of 24 - face almost a 40 per cent chance of being divorced.

Although the bureau figures show that divorce can happen at any stage of marriage (almost 10% of couples divorced last year had been married for 25 years or more), the most dangerous time appears to be in the second year.

More couples break up in the second year of marriage than at any other stage. After three years, odds of a marriage collapsing decline with each year it survives. Sixty per cent of couples divorced last year did so within 10 years of wedding.

Almost one in 50 couples in their late 20's were divorced last year, compared with less than one in 500 couples in their 60's. Three-quarters of women divorced last year were under 40, as were two-thirds of men divorced.

The figures reflect the relatively high failure rate of second marriages. Almost one in four people divorced within the first four years of marriage had been divorced before. In all, one in six men divorced last year had been divorced before, and one in seven women.

The bureau figures show that the number of children caught up in broken marriages is declining with the fall in women's fertility. But in the past six years just under 275,000 children have seen their parents divorce, most of them after at least 10 years of marriage.

Tim Colebatch
The Age. 24/07/90

MAN OF THE TREES TURNS TO PEOPLE

The challenge for a social security minister is to get the pension working as a safety net, with accessible ladders out of it, rather than as a poverty trap.

Here Senator Richardson was able to offer some, albeit long-term, hope and several specific commitments, including the review of the pension income test foreshadowed by his predecessor, Brian Howe, with results by the end of the year. He extended last year's promise to exempt age pensioners from income tax by 1995 to sole parents. This could reduce the effective marginal tax rates by 10.5 to 19 cents in the dollar.

Senator Richardson repeated his denial of Liberal-inspired reports of Government plans to cut off pensions to parents whose youngest child was 12. "Whatever savings come from social security for the budget, they won't be in the area of sole-parent pensions", he said.

This was reassuring to the welfare sector, to whom Senator Richardson, with his reputation as a cynical numbers man, had been something of an unknown quantity.

It may turn out to be better to have a strong but open-minded minister, than one like Brian Howe who was avowedly sympathetic and close to the sector, but who was inclined to score brownie points with the economic rationalists in his party by volunteering ever more painful budget cuts in his own portfolio.

Mr Howe never understood the mechanics of poverty traps. Instead, his attachment to directing resources to the most needy obscured the fact that the income tests needed to achieve this objective also discouraged recipients from paid work, thus increasing the number of the needy.

Mr Howe's proudest reform, the family

allowance supplement to low-income two-parent families from 1988, was introduced without any consideration of the penalties its income test imposes (by way of high effective marginal tax rates) on second earners.

It is to be hoped that Senator Richardson's review also includes this third group of low-income women now likely to join sole parents and unemployed families in the poverty traps.

Rosemary West
The Age, June 1990

INCIDENCE OF CHILDREN IN SUBSTITUTE CARE

It is estimated that at any one time in 1989, there were nearly thirteen thousand children in substitute care throughout Australia. Based on figures provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics on children aged up to nineteen years in the Australian population, this represents an incidence of one in every 400 children in the Australian population.

Of these, just over half (54%) were in foster care facilities. This involved nearly seven thousand children. The remainder were in residential facilities. This involved nearly six thousand children. Overall, about one-sixth (nearly 2,300) were in facilities specifically for disabled children.

Barbara Szwarc 1990

NATIONAL ENQUIRY INTO HOMELESS CHILDREN

The Federal Human Rights Commissioner, Mr Brian Burdekin said at the opening of his Melbourne Hearings, on the 27th June that State and Federal Governments had failed to establish promised programmes for homeless youth.

He also claimed that millions of dollars had been misdirected and that Governments were making it harder for community groups to help young people.

The neglect of State wards and failure to provide adequate and appropriate services meant children were dying because of neglect and indifference. The Juvenile Justice system in some States is grossly inadequate and in fact responsible for some of those deaths.

"I am particularly concerned by reports that a recommendation highlighting the need for flexibility, consultation and co-operation have been misinterpreted and shaped into yet another set of rigid bureaucratic funding conditions."

Inappropriate programmes were being developed because of a lack of community consultation and a lack of resources.

Issues he felt were not being adequately addressed included the measures for dealing with child abuse and responsibility for 12-15 year olds in a society where more than one half of the homeless young people became homeless before they were fifteen years of age.

The inquiry will be set in various cities around Australia and a report will be available later in this year.

Further information can be obtained from: Human Rights Commission, G.P.O. Box 5218, Sydney N.S.W. 2001

SCHOOL RETENTION CONTINUES STEADY GROWTH

The number of Australian school students staying on to year 12 continued to rise last year, according to figures released yesterday by the Bureau of Statistics.

The 1989 statistics showed that the retention rate of secondary school students to year 12 rose from 57.6% in 1988 to 60.3% last year. More girls (65.2%) stayed at school than boys (55.5%).

But the retention figures varied greatly. While a healthy 85.6% of A.C.T. students finished year 12, only 39.7% did in Tasmania. The Victorian figure of 60.5% was just above the national average and up from 56.9% the previous year.

A spokesman for the federal Education Minister, Mr Dawkins, said the figures were pleasing and showed that the Government's policy of encouraging students to stay at school was working. Since 1984, retention rates have risen from 45% of students to about 60%.

The number of government school students fell marginally while private school numbers rose slightly.

Gareth Boreham
The Age, 07/06/90.

WHY WE NEED A SUMMIT TO SAVE THE FAMILY

But isn't it time to think about what is happening to the Australian family and ask why there are more than half a million young Australians living below the poverty line, at least 20,000 of them regarded as street kids?

This is our problem. It will not go away unless we get ashamed and angry and demand action; not Government action but people action. It is through people power that Australia's children can be helped. Here are the facts:

- Approximately 90,000 children are in families where the bread-winner has been unemployed for longer than nine months.
- Drug abuse is the second biggest killer of Australians between 15 and 20. First place goes to road accidents. Excessive alcohol is often the cause.
- Nearly 40% [sic]* of Australian girls between 14 and 19 will become pregnant and 50% of them will have abortions this year.
- Suicide is major cause of death in the 15-24 age group across Australia. Every day in Australia, one young person commits suicide. (A young person is defined as someone 22 years and under.)

*should be nearly 4% Ed.

- Fifteen per cent of Australian boys under 14 admit to getting drunk at least once a week.

- In 1986/87 at least 34,000 cases of child abuse were reported throughout Australia, and about 60% were confirmed.

- Self-mutilation among children institutionalised for 12 months or more is common. Again, it is a cry for help.

- The incidence of child poverty is higher in Australia than in Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, Canada or the United Kingdom. According to a report submitted to the federal Government by the Brotherhood of St Laurence, only children in the US fare worse.

Of course, there are many hundreds of thousands of young Australians who grow up in loving, caring families. They are given a head start that enables them to fulfil their potential and become confident, accomplished and secure young adults.

But we simply cannot and must not ignore the troubled young people who become our daily statistics, who feel unwanted, unloved and without hope.

Ita Buttrose
Ita, June 1990

"... 20 per cent of the long-term unemployed have dependent children..."

Impact, December/January 1989-90

AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN APPROACHING THE 1990's.

Based on the last National Census - 1986. B. Szwarc 1989.

Ethnic Origin

A profile of children in Australia today shows that they have their origins in various racial and ethnic groups, namely from Europe, the United Kingdom and Asia.

A total of 353,003 school age children (i.e. aged between 5 to 19 years) were not born in Australia. This represents approximately one in every ten school-aged children in Australia.

There are 119,618 children under the age of 19 years who are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders. This represents approximately 2.4% of all children.

Family Structure

In Australia, approximately 85% of the children who live at home, live in a family headed by a married (or defacto) couple.

However, the shape of the Australian family is changing. Three major developments are occurring - these being: the increase in the number of children being brought up in single parent families and in blended or reconstructed families; and the decrease in the size of families in Australia.

Increase in Single Parent Families

There has been a significant increase in

the number of families headed by single parents.

There are approximately 2.2 million families with dependent children in Australia today. Of these, 324,171 are single parent households. This represents 14.9% of all families. In other words, one in seven families in Australia today are single parent families.

This represents a significant increase in the proportion of such families five years earlier, when the 1981 Census showed that there were 282,000 single parent families, representing only 12.9% (or one in every eight) of all families with dependent children.

According to a recent report by the Department of Social Security, it has been estimated that the number of sole parent families more than doubled between 1969 and 1986, increasing from 7.1% of all families with dependent children to 14.9% in 1986. This increase resulted partially from social factors such as changing patterns of marriage and marriage dissolution; a decrease in rates of first marriage; an increase in separation and divorce; and an increase in ex-nuptial births.

In Australia, more than 17,000 sole parent families with about 30,000 children come from non-English speaking backgrounds. This represents about 10% of the total number of sole parents.

Increase in Reconstructed or Blended Families

The shape of the Australian family is also changing, in that 7.3% of all children under 18 years of age have been affected by the divorce of their parents since 1976. Many parents have remarried or entered de-facto relationships which means that as many as one million children are not living with their two biological parents, but in 'reconstructed' or 'blended' families.

According to estimates made by the Australian Institute of Family Studies, around 30-33% of the marriages in the mid 70's will end in divorce, and that in the past decade, almost 500,000 Australian children have gone through the trauma of divorce in their families. Furthermore, by the time they reach 16 years of age, estimates say that 16.5% of adolescents will have experienced the divorce of their parents and around three quarters of a million children now live in families where one or both parents have remarried.

Other estimates say that by the year 2000 as many as 40% of Australia's children could live in blended families and 20% in lone parent families.

According to a report recently put out by the National Health and Medical Research Council, in the year 1986 alone, more than 45,000 children were involved in their parents divorces. Furthermore, as de-facto relationships are not recorded and some

married couples live apart without divorcing, the total number of children affected by family breakdown is not known. According to the report, only in exceptional circumstances was divorce not followed by reduced living standards, especially for mothers and children.

Following divorce most Australian children live with their mother. Although precise estimates are not available, about 80% of children live with their mother post-separation; about 15% live with their father and about 5% in other circumstances.

Furthermore, it is estimated that over 50% of the children whose parents have divorced are living in stepfamilies, most with a stepfather.

The positive and negative effects of reconstructed families on the well-being of children is still largely undetermined.

Decrease in Family Size

Australian families now have fewer dependant children.

The Department of Social Security's Family Allowance statistics reveal that the average number of dependent children or students per family has been decreasing, dropping from 2.09 in 1977 to 1.97 in 1985. The number of families with five or more children has also dropped steadily, from 59,300 in June 1977 to 32,400 in June 1985 — a decrease of 45%.

Young Refugees

About 300 juvenile refugees are accepted into Australia each year without accompanying parents. Often their parents were left in Saigon or in Vietnam, and they were virtually given to whoever would take them and bring them into the country. In December 1988, there were 2,219 of such children living in this country.

Teenage Pregnancies

Despite social changes that could plausibly lead more girls to get pregnant, teenage parenthood has more than halved since 1971. Better contraception rather than more abortion is behind the decline from more than 30,000 births a year to teenagers in 1971 to less than 15,000 in 1985.

Alcohol and Drug Problems

According to a report to the National Health and Medical Research Council on a New South Wales survey on alcohol and adolescents, only three per cent of teenagers say they have never consumed alcohol.

Violence and the Media

Australian children watch more than 13,000 acts of violence on television over a ten year period, according to revelations made by Professor B. Tonge from Sydney's Camperdown Children's Hospital.

Child Accidents

The Child Accident Prevention Foundation of Australia estimates that home leisure and consumer product-related injuries account for at least 30% of all accidents and 20% of disabilities to children.

Truancy

Many thousands of children stay away from school each day. A study in 1985 conducted in New South Wales found that 22,000 students a day were absent from school in that State alone, without good reason.

Some schools reported an absentee rate of 12% to 20%, yet legitimate absence accounted for less than 5%.

Similarly a 1984 survey in Victoria found that up to 15,000 Victorian secondary students were missing for a day or more each week. This survey, which was conducted by the Victorian Institute of Secondary Education, found that half the State's students in years 7 to 11 probably wagged school at some time in the school year. For most of these students, wagging was 'episodic'. The three year study of 2,400 students in government and private schools concluded that the two key factors which were attributable were the student's attitude to their schools and teachers, and the influence of peers.

Teenage Runaways

It is estimated that between 12,000 and 15,000 young people run away from home each year.

Homelessness

According to the Human Rights Commissioner, Mr Brian Burdekin, the plight of Australia's homeless children is one of extreme seriousness. The dearth of information on homeless children makes it difficult to know how many there are. However according to the report released by the Human Rights Commission on homeless children, there are currently an estimated 20,000 to 25,000 homeless children in Australia. This proportion is probably an underestimation because many homeless children are 'hidden' from the system.

The enquiry has also found that the number of homeless people under twenty five years has grown rapidly since the 1970's and that the average age was also falling.

Many of these children are State Wards.

There is said to be a high correlation between violence and abused children and homeless children — many having run away either because they have been very badly abused and in many cases their homes have simply disintegrated.

The suicide rate is extremely high for these children.

Barbara Swarc
Children's Bureau, 1989

YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

In June 1988, more than 55,000 sixteen and seventeen year-olds were unemployed, of these, about 2,000 were not family members, and therefore, likely to be at serious risk of becoming homeless.

It is estimated that 75 in every 1,000 unemployed young people in this age group were likely to be homeless or at risk of such.

B. Szwarc, 1989

YOUTH SUICIDE IN AUSTRALIA

In the report on Youth Suicide in Australia, recently completed by Gail Mason of the Australian Institute of Criminology for the Youth Bureau, Department of Employment, Education and Training the following rates and trends were noted.

In 1965 there were 80 males and 35 females under 25 recorded by the Australian Bureau of Statistics as having died by suicide. Recently released figures reveal that in 1988 this number had risen to 388 males and 60 females. For the 15 to 19 year old age group, 1988 suicide rates are 20.94 per 100,000 population for males and 3.77 per 100,000 population for females. In the 20 to 24 age group the equivalent rates are 35.17 for males and 5.24 for females.

In 1981 15.8% of all deaths in the 20 to 24 age group and 7.9% on the 15 to 19 age group were the result of suicide (Youth Suicide Working Party 1988). According to Hassan & Carr (1987), until 1961, suicide was primarily a problem among older age groups.

For every suicide committed by people under 25 years, there were three of four suicides committed by people aged 50 years and above. By 1984, this picture had changed significantly. Suicide has increasingly slipped into the younger age groups, so that there is little difference between the suicide rates of persons in the various age categories above 20 years (p.8).

Examination of the Australian Bureau of Statistics figures for suicide reveals two main trends among Australian youth. Firstly, there has been a fairly constant rate of suicide since the mid-1960's for the following categories:

- 10 to 14 year old females and males
- 15 to 19 year old females
- 20 to 24 year old females
(with gradual increases)

Secondly, an increase of more than 100% since the mid-1960's has been recorded in the categories:

- 15 to 19 year old males
- 20 to 24 year old males

The large increase in recorded suicides for males in these two age groups is a problem of substantial proportion for the Australian community and a compelling motivation for research of the present kind. There are indicators that some of this rise may be the

result of changes in coroners' recording practices and this will be discussed shortly. While attention must be drawn to the alarming increase during 1987 for females in the 15 to 19 age group a significant decrease was recorded in 1988. Despite this decrease, 1988 figures show a rise over the rate for 1986.

It is important to remember that the actual numbers of young people who suicide are low and consequently small absolute increases in the numbers can lead to large percentage changes (Maris, 1985).

The dramatic rise in suicide rates for young Australians, particularly males, can be contrasted to trends among the older population. During the period 1961 to 1984 the suicide rate of men aged 40 to 64 years displayed a consistent decline. The rates for men aged 35 to 39 years and over 65 years, peaked in 1966 or 1971 and then declined, during the same period the suicide rates of women in each age group also peaked in either 1966 or 1971 and declined thereafter. For all age groups except 20 to 24 years and 45 to 49 years the female suicide rates in 1984 were the same or less than they were in 1961. For women aged 55 years and more the suicide rate fell by approximately 50% between 1961 and 1984 (Hassan & Carr, 1987). Suicide rates among people, especially men over 80 years of age increased significantly between 1980 and 1985 (Hayward, Zubrick & Silburn, 1988).

The increase in suicide among Australia's youth can also be viewed in the following terms:

- Recent 1988 figures reveal further increases in the rates for males aged 15 to 24 years.
- Suicide now accounts for one in seven deaths among males aged 15 to 19 years. In 1966 only one in 20 male deaths aged 15 to 19 years was caused by suicide (Hassan, 1987).
- The rate of completed suicide among Australian boys is nearly five times greater than among girls (Kosky, 1987).
- In 1986 there was one adolescent suicide every 70 hours. An estimated 7000 years of life are lost every year due to teenage suicides (Hassan, 1987).

Mason, G. 1989.

Australian Institute of Criminology.
Youth Suicide in Australia: Prevention Strategies was commissioned by the Youth Bureau of the Department of Employment and Training. Copies are available from the Youth Bureau. Phone (06) 276 8203

ALCOHOL AND DRUGS

There is no doubt that the misuse of alcohol and drugs, especially by parents, has a massive impact on many children.

Chris Birrell and Sue Jarvis in their 1988 report on detoxification services for the Women's Council on Homelessness and Addiction, refer to some studies concerning

the needs of women.

In 1968 it was estimated that approximately 180,000 Australian women and about 90,000 Australian men were alcohol or drug dependent. (Rankin & Wilkenson, 1968). While these figures suggest that twice as many women as men were chemically dependent, detoxification services have traditionally served and been dominated by male clients. Until recently women's chemical dependence received little to no attention. In the last decade many more women have begun seeking treatment for their chemical dependence. For example in the period of January 1987 to June 1987, in Victoria, 1,008 women were admitted to private/non-government facilities for detoxification purposes as compared with 2,371 men (Birrell & Jarvis, 1988).

While there has been an increase in the number of women seeking treatment, concerns have been raised about the need for more appropriate detoxification services that cater for the needs of women, particularly those women with children (Birrell & Jarvis, 1988).

While alcohol remains the highest drug of dependence for men, women are at a greater risk to the legally sanctioned and prescribed 'pills' than are men. Curron and Golombok (1985) found that more than 20% of Western women are prescribed tranquillisers or anti-depressants. It was also found that women in the middle and later years as well as younger women following a pregnancy are particularly at risk of being prescribed these drugs of dependence (Cooperstock & Lennard, 1979).

Recent Australian estimates for the prescription of drugs through the Federal Pharmaceutical Benefits scheme (excluding private prescriptions) show the annual prescription rate of drugs as being 6 million for the benzodiazepine group, 3.3 million for anti-depressants, 600,000 for the phenothiazine group of major tranquillisers and 10 million for psychotropics (The Age, 14/9/87, p.11). The majority of these were likely to have been prescribed for women.

Birrell and Jarvis, (1988) argue that there is a need for services to be more responsive and more effective in service delivery for women. Some of the factors which have been noted as attracting more chemically dependent women into treatment have included the provision of women-sensitive services, small groups, staff expertise, child related services and greater outreach with other service providers in the health and welfare sectors to facilitate referral of women for treatment.

Reed (1985), discussing drug misuse and dependency in the International Journal of Addiction Vol: 2 (1) 1985, states that women's access to and benefit from treatment would be especially reinforced by the provision of child care and parenting services within these. She cites a number of

American studies which indicate a positive correlation between the provision of on-site child care and parenting programs, with a greater number of women seeking and remaining in treatment. "Since many women's concern is for the well-being of their children, the provision of these services can also act as a strong motivating force for women with children to seek earlier intervention in their chemical dependence." Reed also notes that the children of chemically dependent people are in need of these services.

H. Williams, C. Italiano,
I. Nicodemou, S.Tseros; 1990

CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

There are now more and more children with disabilities living in the general community, usually with their own families, instead of being isolated in residential care. This is supported by the fact that there has been a 65% increase over the last ten years in the number of children receiving the Handicapped Child's Allowance. In 1977 only 18,820 families were receiving this allowance, whereas by 1987 this number had risen to 31,061. Of these, 85.8% were for children who were categorized as severely handicapped.

There are now approximately two and a quarter million children with disabilities in Australia. Of these, thirteen thousand live in health establishments. The rest live with other people, mainly in household settings.

More than half a million children aged between five and fifteen years in Australia have disabilities regarded as severe.

One fifth of the disabled children aged between five and fifteen years who are living at home need help with self care. A fifth also need help with mobility.

B. Szwarc, 1989

CHILD REARING AND CHILD CARE

Figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics indicate that in 1986, 40% of the children aged under four years had mothers in the labour force. Overall, the two-income family has become the major child rearing format, with just over half of the two parent families with dependant children falling into this category. The traditional single-income family now comprises about 40% of two-parent child-rearing units, with 'no-earner' families in about 10%.

According to the 1986 Census, about 40% of married women with children worked at least thirty-five hours each week.

Furthermore, Australian Bureau of Statistics figures on child care show that, between 1984-87, there was a 60% increase in the use of formal care services in child care centres and 34% increase in those primarily using child care for work-related reasons.

According to a 1986 survey by the Office of Child Care, approximately 65% of the

children who attend centre-based child care and 78% of those in family day care attend for work related reasons.

Statistics also show that of 1.2 million children in the 0-4 age group, one third (approx. 400,000) have both parents, or a sole parent, in the work force and that 140,000 children in 1987 were using existing public provisions for child care.

B. Szwarc, 1989

VIOLENCE IN AUSTRALIA

Australian Institute of Criminology 1989
Report for National Committee on Violence

Domestic Assault

Assault is the most common form of violence in the home. Despite public awareness campaigns and an expansion of services to its victims, domestic violence continues to be under-reported.

Traditionally, Australians have tended to view violence in the home as a private, not a criminal matter. Anecdotal evidence collected by the Western Australian Task Force on Domestic Violence (1986) suggests that some victims of domestic assault never reveal their situation, many because of a perception that it is their problem alone. Commonly, too, the victim has been regarded as bearing some responsibility for domestic assault as a precipitator of the offence.

Among the myths that shroud domestic assault is that it is just the occasional push or slap. In reality domestic violence is often repeated, often frequent and can involve serious physical injury to the victim. Domestic assault is also not an isolated, spur-of-the-moment incident. For instance a Domestic Violence Committee in NSW identified numerous cases in which victims were assaulted repeatedly over periods of up to ten years (NSW Domestic Violence Committee 1985).

What is Known About Domestic Assault?

No Australian national study of domestic assault has been undertaken so it is impossible to gauge its incidence and prevalence accurately. However, domestic assault has been the subject of recent government reports in a number of Australian jurisdictions. Some idea of the size and nature of the domestic violence problem can be gained from these studies, as the following data illustrates:

- in 1985 the NSW Police estimated that it received about 140,000 domestic violence calls per annum; (South Australia, Domestic Violence Council, 1987);
- in a survey conducted for the Federal Government's Office of the Status of Women (in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet) nearly half of those samples knew someone who had suffered or committed acts of domestic assault (Public Policy Research Centre, 1988);
- in some domestic assault cases children

are also physically abused by the violent partner in the relationship;
- some victims of domestic violence are attacked weekly, and even daily.

Child Abuse

An umbrella term which encompasses physical, sexual and emotional abuse and neglect. Like domestic violence, it seems to know no socio-economic boundaries, although risk factors may be greater in some socio-economic groups.

Societal recognition of the battered child came in the 1960's but it was not until the 1980's that due attention was given to the existence and serious nature of child sexual abuse. Government recognition of the magnitude of child sexual abuse in Australia is shown by the fact that a number of states including Western Australia, New South Wales and South Australia have commissioned recent task forces to report on this issue. It should be made clear that child sexual abuse need not involve intercourse.

What is Known About Child Abuse in Australia?

Despite widespread acknowledgment of the existence of child abuse, little research has been done in Australia on its nature and incidence. Research, especially on a nationwide basis, has been hampered by a number of factors. First, a significant amount of child abuse in all its forms remains undisclosed. Second, variations in definition and notification requirements in different jurisdictions make it difficult to compare state-by-state figures (Western Australian Child Sexual Abuse Task Force, 1987). Data that has been collected shows a rise in the number of reported cases of child abuse, but it cannot be concluded that the incidence of child abuse is increasing. The apparent increase may be due to mandatory reporting and some attitudinal changes to and recognition of child abuse by professionals, parents and even neighbours.

Bearing in mind these cautions about the interpretation of statistics in this area available data suggests that:

- the rate of child abuse in Australia may be approximately 3 cases per 1000 children (Adler, 1986), although some would regard this as an underestimation;
- in NSW notifications of child abuse, including physical, sexual and emotional abuse, rose from 900 cases in 1978 to approximately 22,938 cases in 1987 (*Sydney Morning Herald* 16 April 1988). Reporting had been made mandatory in 1977. It is estimated that some 60% of notifications are substantiated (*Sydney Morning Herald* 16 April 1988);
- it has been 'estimated that 25% of all fractures seen in the first two years of life may be due to the 'battered child syndrome', and that at least 10% of children presenting to casualty departments

with 'accidents' may be suffering from child abuse." (Oates, 1982);

- results of a questionnaire distributed in a NSW women's refuge showed that almost one-quarter of children in the refuge had suffered physical abuse and 7% had been sexually abused (Noesjirwan, 1985);
- perpetrators of child sexual abuse are mostly male and a percentage of them, perhaps 20%, (Grunseit, 1987) were themselves abused as children;
- the majority of the perpetrators of child sexual abuse are family members or family friends. Notifications of child sexual abuse in Western Australia indicate that in over 80% of cases the offender was from within the family or from the family's circle of friends and acquaintances. (Western Australian Child Sexual Abuse Task Force, 1987.)

Australian Attitudes to Violence in the Home

The information presented so far suggests that violence in the home is not a rarity. Moreover, attitudinal studies show that such violence is widely tolerated in the Australian community.

A recent survey on domestic violence conducted for the Office of the Status of Women (Public Policy Research Centre, 1988) involving over 1500 Australian men and women found that:

- just over 20% of men and just under 20% of women who were interviewed believed that there were circumstances which warranted a husband using physical violence against his wife;
- Australians appear willing to justify the use of physical force against children, including kicking or beating;
- a third of those surveyed considered that welfare of law enforcement authorities should not become involved in domestic violence incidents and that such incidents should be resolved within the privacy of the home;
- the survey concluded that 'pro-violence attitudes occur across all groups in the community'.

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JUNE 1990

THE LEAVING HOME TAPES

Producer: Adelaide College of TAFE	Sales Tax Exempt Price: \$190/VHS
Duration: 52 minutes	Sales Tax Inclusive Price: \$228/VHS
Year: 1990	Freight: \$6.00

THE LEAVING HOME TAPES comprises 3 short dramatisations which explore a range of topics connected with leaving home for the first time. The tapes are designed to reduce the incidence of ill-prepared and ill-informed young people who leave home and find themselves homeless. Directed at 15-18 year olds, the principal aims are to introduce the information and skills needed to make informed choices about available housing options, and to develop a critical understanding of housing rights and responsibilities.

1. I'M HOME: Meet Jane - a capable independent young woman with a part-time job that enables her to move out of home. Jane loses her job and without an income loses her flat. Follow Jane as she discovers the options and support that are available to her.

Serves as a discussion starter for a wide range of topics including the different reasons for leaving home; the emotional impact of leaving one's home and family; the expectations versus the realities; the economic viability of living independently; the problems associated with obtaining safe, secure accommodation; and just how achievable is home ownership. (18 minutes)

2. MY PLACE: Explores in a light-hearted manner the intricacies of public housing, home ownership and the private rental market. Leases, bonds, mortgages etc. are all defined and the pro's and con's of each option are examined. (8 minutes)

3. TALKING BOOK: Provides detailed information about a wide range of housing services. The guidelines for using these services are explained and suggestions for maximising the benefits of these housing agencies are given. (26 minutes)

A RESOURCE PACKAGE - INCLUDING GUIDE NOTES TO MAKE YOUR JOB EASIER!

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SIGNS OF A NEW DREAMING
AMONG THE YOUNG

Geoff Maslen

- Courtesy *The Age*, Melbourne

It was not so long ago that the Aborigines of Echuca were allocated two places a year in the local kindergarten. Two places for the children of the entire community.

Like much else affecting the Kooris of Echuca, that has changed. Today, the Aborigines have established their own kindergarten. With Koori women in charge, the centre provides pre-school children with the sorts of activities that most white parents take for granted.

With a house donated by the local Uniting Church, the women began. Several have started the kindergarten training course at Melbourne University's institute of early childhood development. So the Koori community should eventually have its own qualified kindergarten teachers.

The centre is called Berrimba ('forever learning') and it does much more than care for the 20 or so pre-school children, although the importance of that can hardly be over-estimated. For three and four nights a week after school, Berrimba also acts as a tutorial centre where primary school children come to get extra help - from trained white tutors - with their school work.

Says Sue Saunders, an outreach worker employed by the co-operative, "We are trying to catch those kids who in the past would have slipped through the schooling system without learning a thing. That's got to stop."

Apart from the usual kindergarten activities that are designed to aid any young person's development, Berrimba also offers an induction into Koori culture. The children pore over books illustrated and written by Aborigines and adults come to teach them tribal dances and songs.

"We want them to feel proud of their heritage so that when they go to school they can cope with the taunts and the insults about them being black," Sue Saunders says.

The centre operates a mentor program whereby Koori children are linked with an adult Aborigine who acts as a friend and helper and who is there if the child has problems. For many of the children, the mentor is often the only older male in their lives with whom they have close contact. Alcohol, despair and disease have taken a heavy toll on Echuca's middle-aged men.

That should change with the new generation that is growing up. The centre has already had a powerful impact on the confidence and self-esteem of the children and their parents. More Koori students than ever before are enrolled at the high school - the Aborigines are highly critical of the technical school for its perceived lack of concern for their children - and Kooris are now leaving with their VCE.

Picture: Sandy Scheltema



Josh Walsh (left), Christopher East, David East and Mathew Bulloch learn about their heritage from their teacher, Sonny Cooper

**QUALITY OF MERCY
BUILDS NEW QUALITY OF LIFE**

By Geoff Maslen
Courtesy *The Age*, Melbourne
Picture: Sandy Scheltema

A ground swell of change is transforming Echuca's Aboriginal community. In the past year alone, Echuca's community justice panel is estimated to have kept almost 90 Aborigines out of jail and to have saved Victoria more than \$600,000.

The cause of the change is a community justice scheme, the first of its kind in Australia, that has attracted interest from the police, the judiciary and other Aboriginal groups across the country.

During the past 12 months, Aborigines convicted in Echuca's magistrate's court have received community based orders rather than imprisonment. Had jail terms – for drunkenness, petty theft, assault – been imposed, the blacks would have been serving a collective total of at least 12 years in prison. The all-up cost would have been more than \$625,000.

But the impact of the community justice panel has been more profound than merely saving the state money. Not only has the panel overcome the deaths in custody that have followed the jailing of blacks elsewhere in Australia, it has radically altered relations between the Aboriginal community and the police.

Eight members of the Echuca Aboriginal Co-operative serve voluntarily on the community justice panel. Each is on call 24 hours a day for one week at a time. Should an Aborigine be arrested in Echuca or surrounding districts the police contact the

panel member on duty and wait for him before any interview is started or charge laid.

Usually, after the police formalities are over, the Aborigine is released in the care of the justice panel member. Before the charges are heard the panel meets the alleged offender and discusses what is required should a community based order be imposed.

If the aborigine agrees to the conditions, a panel member accompanies the accused to the court hearing. Local magistrates have agreed that no charge against an Aborigine will be heard unless a member of the panel is present.

Senior Sergeant Ian Herauville has no doubt that the scheme "is the best thing I have seen in 10 years in the police force in Echuca. It has generated greater trust, and more importantly, helped significantly to reduce Aboriginal arrests."

"There is more understanding between the police and the Koori community," Senior Sargeant Herauville says. "Koories are beginning to appreciate that we have procedures that have to be followed. They used to feel we were being excessively bureaucratic because they were black; now they recognise that we are simply doing our job."

Mr Norman Hodge initiated the scheme in Echuca and is now state co-ordinator of the program. He says Echuca is more advanced than any other Aboriginal community in Victoria. "It has worked in Echuca because we laid down the guidelines, which the police accepted, and because of the effort those involved have put into it."

"It's bloody hard work and has involved all of us at some stage getting up at two or three o'clock in the morning to go down to the police station. During the early months

we were getting 10 to 15 calls a week. Now, however, a week could go by and we'd receive only one or two calls."

Criticisms of the scheme have come from Echuca's white community and from some of Senior Sergeant Herauville's own officers. "People have complained that we are going easy on the Koories," he says. "But we are not offering anything that is not available to any other member of the community."



The old Echuca Courthouse: now a museum and cultural centre, Senior Sergeant Ian Herauville shares the steps with the initiator of the community scheme Mr Norm Hodge, and with Val Mitchell, Stewart Magan, Troy Egan and Mathew Hodge.

JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEMS

There are serious shortcomings entailed in drawing conclusions from official statistical collections in the juvenile justice area. There is a lack of uniformity in data collection and publication across States. There is no uniform national data collection on youth offending. Results from existing collections must be viewed with caution as inconsistencies are apparent, complicated by the variation in definitions and approaches to legislation and practice between states by police, courts, correctional and welfare authorities. The following however is an attempt to paint the picture from a variety of State sources. It estimates the number of young people formally involved and the rate per 1,000 youth population dealt with by the juvenile justice system in each State.

Official statistics also fail to account for offending not reported or detected, offending not cleared up and detections not fully processed, in addition to the varied recording practices.

Work over the past few years by the Australian Institute of Criminology and some researchers is beginning to throw more light on the picture. The results of self report studies including longitudinal research and more systematic approaches to obtaining data from victims are gradually adding some objectivity. Community understanding is still prone to distortion from the media's tendency to sensationalise offending and dramatise youth problems and the temptation for politicians and others to periodically seize on law and order opinions rather than facts. Most offending by children and young people appears to be temporary, transitory and part of growing up. There is an obligation on adults and

officialdom to ensure that systems for responding to delinquency are adequately resourced and implemented and that they do not make things worse for the community by compounding the initial problems.

Marked variations between states require attention, as does the gross over representation of aboriginal youth in all systems. State authorities have achieved much with decarceration and community based programs. Resources however for adequate implementation and the establishment and maintenance of adequate standards have tended to be slow in coming and often short.

The last decade has focussed heavily on the needs versus deeds debate (welfare or justice models of legislation and service). The challenge for the nineties, is to achieve justice for both victims and offenders, without neglecting the need of either group to be seen as whole people with strengths and frailties, rights and obligations and as potential community contributors who need a safe, supportive and responsive environment in which to live and grow.

Useful published material includes the work of Sat Mukherjee and others in Borowski and Murray's *Delinquency in Australia* 1985 and the more recent work by Frieberg, Fox and Hogan on *Sentencing Young Offenders* a report completed for the Australian Law Reform Commission in 1988.

Workers in the field frequently express concern about the influence of family stress, strain and conflict, insufficient, inconsistent or excessive limit setting or support, lack of opportunity and services in some places, unemployment, homelessness and the effects of alcohol and drug abuse. Despite all of this the number of young people who become serious or persistent offenders appears to be relatively low.

Estimated Total Youths formally involved with the juvenile justice system for offending and (rate per 1,000 youth population)

Year	A.C.T.	N.S.W.	N.T.	Qld.	S.A.	Tas.	Vic.	W.A.
1983/84	553 (22.1)	17,217 (24.1)	2,089 (86.8)	12,587 (39.2)	9,486 (52.5)	¹ 1,800 (23.6)	12,414 (19.9)	16,717 (63.4)
1985/86	956 (36.8)	18,225 (25.4)	3,312 (127.4)	13,748 (42.5)	9,349 (53.0)	² 1,626 (21.7)	16,202 (26.7)	18,785 (70.5)
1987/88	N/A	19,485 (27.4)	N/A	13,935 (43.7)	N/A	³ 2,054 (28.1)	14,092 (24.2)	19,778 (73.2)
						⁴ 1,663 (23.3)		Lloyd Owen

1) Calendar Year 1983 2) Calendar Year 1985 3) Calendar Year 1987 4) Calendar Year 1988