



Editorial

In this final issue of Children Australia for 1990 some emphasis has been given to parenting, noting the need to keep the interests of children at heart and at hand in accord with the journal's general brief. Child bearing and child rearing are rich and remarkable activities, personally unique and momentous, yet commonplace from a societal point of view. The family acts as both cushion and springboard for children where life's dangers and opportunities are concerned. In spite of the penetration and substitution of some of its roles and functions, by external influences, compared to other periods in history, it remains a powerful source of attitudes, beliefs and prejudices. These in turn can have a long term influence on behaviour and events often for a lifetime, often from one generation to the next. The transmission of cultural and subcultural values, norms and customs generally appears to follow the foundations laid down in early childhood. Parents are generally positioned in a box seat or even as stage manager in these processes.

It is likely that some things about parenting do come naturally or instinctively but it is also likely that some of our intuitive responses are derived from the models encountered in our own childhood. It is suggested that the process of socialisation is aided by family based learning which comes in three forms. Firstly there is the learning which comes from imitating, modelling, introjecting etc. consequent on being with and seeing what others do and how they do it. Secondly, there is the learning which follows conditioning of both the classical and operant kind, the responses, the rewards and the punishments which follow our efforts to make our way in the world. Finally there is the learning based on understanding or the insight which follows explanation or access to information made available. Parents hold keys to much of this learning for children. The wider

community can do much to help or hinder parents in the performance of the many tasks involved.

Experience in the child welfare field soon draws attention to the value of parents as individuals being ready and prepared for the role. Even with readiness and preparation there are usually quite enough surprises and contingencies to keep boredom at bay at least at the beginning. Also clear is the value of adequate stability, support, enrichment and stimulation to nurture the discovery of talent and the development of skill in the growing child and the role performance of the parent, be it mother, father, both or substitute caregiver. Given the chance most parents warm to the task and do a good job. Most of those who encounter difficulty want to do a good job. It is to be hoped that Australian society will remain one which places the well being of children high on its list of social imperatives and treats the role of parent as worthwhile, serious and deserving of protection and support.

There are in the nineties some forces at large which add burdens to child bearing and rearing, although more than ever before there is power to plan families and influence the frequency and timing of childbirth. There are moral and environmental dilemmas, there are major social factors. There are powerful economic factors.

The community which truly values its future and its children will actively seek to address these issues, attacking obstacles and stresses, identifying and filling gaps. It is not enough to entrust these matters to nature or the market place. History is filled with examples of these institutions being found wanting for many children and contemporary examples of neglect and active abuse abound in some instances on a very grand scale. One thinks immediately of children in the Middle East, India,

Rumania, the townships of Africa and those identified by Commissioner Burdekin across Australia. The latter include a significant group who have been formally placed in the care of the State and who are the subject of a recently released study by Janet Taylor of the Brotherhood of St. Laurence "Leaving Care and Homelessness".

The articles in this issue of *Children Australia* contain much food for thought. Responding to the statistical evidence that even the second attempt at serial monogamy quite often breaks down with considerable effect on children, Cynthia Schultz, Noel Schultz and Alan Craddock report on some research directed at improving the quality of couple relationships with the needs of children in mind. Juliet Harper helps us to revisit recent history and look at some aspects of our societal norms around childbearing. It provides some reminders of the human propensity for prejudice, blind spots, insensitivity and the time it takes to come to grips with some of the hard social questions. Neville Turner explores the law and judicial practice around questions of custody and access, questions with major implications in the lives of a large number of children and their custodial and non custodial parents. Cathy Boland provides a critique of four hospital maternity ward studies and raises some significant ethical issues to be found with this research and practice at the interface of health and welfare systems.

Also in this issue a beginning attempt has been made to put the reader in touch with some of the material and programs now available in Australia in the genres of parent help programs, parent skill development and parent education. This attempt has been made from a national perspective and it is clear that quite a bit of activity is

going on at state and local levels. At least one state is currently engaged in an extensive survey of agencies involved in parent help activities and has an evaluation of a number of pilot parent help programs in train. The journal would be pleased to hear about anything else of this nature which might be shared with readers. The issue of surrogate parenthood is topical and is one of the current moral and philosophical dilemmas for our society. Julie Martin has developed a discussion paper seeking to detail the present debates.

The book review on child poverty comes as the Australian economy is formally in recession and as we move into 1991, increasing numbers of families are experiencing the financial stresses associated with unemployment. The impact of global economics cannot now be underestimated nor the greed, foolishness, ignorance and misfortune associated with some socially and culturally unproductive forms of speculation. Power must be constrained by at least some social goals, principles and ethics. Politicians must also be constantly concerned about the social impact of their policies. Hopefully positive visions for the future will be found to lead and direct human energy and wealth more constructively. Useful reviews have also been provided on a guide to parents on positive discipline and another about psychology and parenting.

Chris Goddard in *Point and Counterpoint* introduces us to Janus Korczak, a remarkable child welfare practitioner and martyr from relatively recent history. Vigilance against inhumanity is an ever present need and the reminder of that historical period should serve to alert us to the possibility of inhumanity coming dressed up as necessary efficiency, or as a force easier to tolerate than to challenge.



The National Children's Bureau of Australia is an independent non-government organization committed to improving the quality of care and life opportunities available to children in Australia. Since its establishment in 1971, the NCBA has played an important advocacy role in support of children. Through its publications, Information Service, conferences and research activities, the NCBA promotes a national and multi-disciplinary approach to children's issues.