



Book Reviews

Asylum to Action Family Action 1851-1991 : A History of Services and Policy Development for Families in times of vulnerability, by Donella Jaggs. 1991. 208pp. \$20 (incl. p&p).

A comprehensive history of child welfare in Victoria has yet to be written. In the meantime we have to be content with organisational histories, usually compiled to coincide with a centenary or other significant anniversary. The worst of these simply celebrate the achievements of the commissioning organisation. The best take a more critical account and attempt to move outside the specific organisation to place it in a local, national and international context.

The Victorian agency, Family Action, published a celebratory history, *The First Hundred Years*, written by the then Superintendent, J. Butler, in 1951. Forty years on the Committee of Family Action commissioned Donella Jaggs of the Phillip Institute School of Community Services and Policy Studies to once again put the organisation under the microscope.

Her book, *Asylum to Action*, is both an adjunct to and an extension of the earlier work. Although it sets out to once again review the entire history of the organisation the focus, by agreement between the author and the organisation, is a very different one. This is a policy history, looking at the way in which management received and used information in developing and changing service provision, with a particular emphasis on the post 2nd World War period. The story of the children and staff who were the users of the service, Jaggs openly concedes, remains to be told.

Family Action is Victoria's oldest family welfare organisation, tracing its origins back to the St. James Visiting Society, which established the colony's first orphan asylum in 1851. The organisation grew with the colony, operating as the Melbourne Orphanage, first in South Melbourne and later in Brighton, for over 100 years

before moving to scattered cottages, as the Melbourne Family Care Organisation, in 1965. It discarded residential care completely in 1987 to re-emerge as a services, advocacy and research organisation under its current name. Clearly such a long and well established organisation has much to tell us about the processes of policy formation in child welfare in Victoria as a whole, and Jaggs, with her detailed knowledge of this field, is well equipped to set the individual story in its wider context.

However, in this book the blending is never really satisfactory. For reasons which are not made clear, the contextual material is italicised and kept completely separate from the story of the organisation itself. Hence the very valuable information about trends in child welfare thinking and the ways in which these were reached and disseminated in Victoria tends not to be given the importance which it deserves. As a result, the story of the organisation itself all too often degenerates into a catalogue of events with no major themes or questions guiding the discussion. Based on annual reports augmented by minute books, printed papers, a small number of interviews, and the author's personal recollections, this is not a "warts and all" approach. Evidence is accepted at face value, critique is muted, conflict is described but not explored and ideology is largely unquestioned.

Clearly the committee of Family Action and their supporters were not looking for a critical account. What they wanted was an explicatory document which showed how their organisation had contributed to the development of child and family welfare in Victoria over the past 140 years and this Donella Jaggs does very well. Beginning in the early colonial years she shows how English notions of philanthropy were applied by local settlers in

meeting the needs of the "deserving poor". The first half of the book documents the triumph of the institutional model where the good of the organisation was paramount and the development of the individual was of little account. It does however also note points at which the Melbourne Orphanage challenged the institutional model, most notably in its development of a rudimentary foster care scheme which went on to allow mothers to be paid to care for their own children, the precursor of Victoria's first widows' pensions.

In the post war world, old ideas of charity were no longer tenable. The second half of this book documents a period of almost continuous change. The rise of the State, the decline of philanthropy, the combination of affluence and inflation, developments in child psychology and changing family forms all posed a challenge with which the voluntary sector has been struggling now for almost fifty years. Those who have supported Family Action through this period will be pleased to see such a positive construction placed upon the way in which their particular organisation has weathered the storm. Those who have been through a similar process in other organisations will be interested to see that their troubles have been shared.

Asylum to Action has a wider role than simply to succour the survivors. It should also go on to inform those who will follow in their path. There is no reason to expect less turbulent times in the future but those who go out to confront such problems without a knowledge of the past are ill prepared to come up with workable solutions. History is not circular, but nor is it completely linear. The innovative "solution" to the problems we face today will have both historical and international precursors. A knowledge

of how and why such precursors were developed and applied will help practitioners of today to refine their own ideas. Jaggs' study of the history of policy and development within the

organisation which went on to become Family Action will be a valuable resource on which such practitioners can draw.

*Reviewer: Shurlee Swain
Australian Studies, Deakin University*

Asylum to Action is available from Family Action, PO Box 259, Oakleigh; \$20 including postage.

Victorian Association of Family Therapists presents

LYNN HOFFMAN M.S.W.

Listening and reflecting with couples and families

A Non-Violent Approach to Family Violence:

An alternative to strategy, secrecy and control.

Techniques from the kitchen table

Date: August 3, 9.30am - 4.30pm
Venue: Bouverie Family Therapy Centre
35 Poplar Road, Parkville

Date: August 4, 9.30am - 4.30pm
Venue: Bouverie Family Therapy Centre
35 Poplar Road, Parkville

About the Workshop

This workshop will present an affirmative, collaborative and open style of working with couples and families. In looking for ways to capture what Carol Gilligan calls 'a different voice', some of us have been questioning the entire field of Psychology. We object to its base in normative theories of development and its reliance on deficiency models for help. We have also begun to question family therapy concepts like problem-solving, strategy, dysfunction, intervention, hierarchy, lifecycle, system, and change.

In their place, we have put a general framework of affirmation, affiliation and appreciation, expressed in descriptions like 'Being Hopeful', 'Bearing Witness', and 'Being There'. We try to look for windows rather than walls, believing that people can often find doors on their own. This does not mean that we refuse to talk about 'bad' things; unless there is a good reason not to, we put them into words and often push them to extremes. Specific formats we have found useful are: Tom Andersen's reflecting team, 'quiet' interviewing, listening in, trading places, conversation about the process, and sharing one's own experiences. Like most therapists we rely on an abundance of stories, parables and images; due to their connotative richness, they seldom sound pejorative.

During the day, a videotaped session with a couple will be shown, illustrating many of the above ideas and questions, and a consultation in this different style will be offered, with all invited to take part.

About the Workshop

This workshop, informed by the ideas generated by the staff of People's Bridge Action in Massachusetts, USA, and Lynn Hoffman as their consultant, will propose an alternative to hardline interventionist models for dealing with family violence. Emphasis is placed on cherishing frontline teams using non-hierarchical formats like peer support groups ('pods'); 'sharevision' instead of supervision; reflecting conversations instead of problem-solving; roving consultations instead of a single expert.

Rather than inviting people to be victims, strengths and resources are encouraged. An attempt is made to 'put people on the Board of Directors' (quite literally). The team also offers peer advocacy training, men's and women's support groups, education in arts and the media (dance and music, desktop publishing, video films) and physical training (ropes course, martial arts, 'Anger Camp'). When counselling is indicated, a style of reflecting and listening is used rather than one of confronting and probing.

Lynn will show a videotape of a session with a couple using a reflecting team and will offer an experiential demonstration of 'sharevision' at work.

About Lynn Hoffman

Lynn Hoffman, author of 'Foundations of Family Therapy' and other noted publications, has been among the most influential figures in the family therapy field in the past two decades. As a commentator, thinker, theoretician and innovator she has helped shift the direction of therapy in new directions. She has held positions at various universities and at the Ackerman Institute for Family Therapy, and has conducted workshops throughout Europe, the UK, Canada, USA and Australia. She is well known for her ability to convey ideas with clarity, and for the humanity and innovation of her approaches.

Registration for Lynn Hoffman

Name:
Address:
Phone: (Work) (Home) (Fax)

Please make cheque payable to V.A.F.T.

Send to: **Simon Kennedy**
PO Box 213, Oakleigh 3166

Enquiries: Simon Kennedy, Tel: 563 3630

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|----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Listening & Reflecting (August 3) | <input type="checkbox"/> \$85 | Student* <input type="checkbox"/> \$40 |
| A Non-Violent Approach (August 4) | <input type="checkbox"/> \$85 | Student* <input type="checkbox"/> \$40 |
| Both Workshops | <input type="checkbox"/> \$150 (before 27 July) | Student* <input type="checkbox"/> \$75 |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> \$160 (after 27 July) | Student* <input type="checkbox"/> \$80 |

* Full time students not in full-time employment