



Editorial

Think globally, Act Locally is one of the remarkable sets of words which pepper the new approach to the environment. A new approach based on the dawning recognition that the most fundamental heritage for our children, the earth, is at risk of being spoiled if not destroyed as a habitat for humans. Such words can motivate, do change behaviour, and are often necessary to reach minds, to fuel informed choices. Along with two other semantic inventions of the new age 'sustainable development' and 'bio diversity' we are being offered some short hand expressions on which to pin some hope and some action. Some might be inclined at first to dismiss these expressions as slogans or propaganda, terms we sometimes use to remain alert to the power of words being used for narrow partisan or political interests. We are all very aware of the power of words being used for commercial interests. In some instances we may find it necessary to go on debating the meaning or the issues which underlie the words. It is often the case that the same words can mean different things to different people. Nonetheless, word smithing is a crucial endeavour in helping the globe and its nations to find a safe passage through the opportunities and threats inherent in existing. In recent weeks we have witnessed an unprecedented gathering of world leaders, including some most unlikely bedfellows, coming together to make commitments in respect to their own local spheres and to plead for similar commitments from others. We have seen the cumbersome engines of the United Nations bureaucracy turning over to take action on sustainable development and bio diversity. Perhaps daunting and difficult work but it is happening. Eureka!

Another idea which relates to the power of words and which has become popular in the helping professions is the notion of reframing. Essentially the idea is one of looking at the same circumstances in a different light, describing the

situation using different terms, coming at it from a different angle. It has been recognised that this process can free one from old strictures, allow attention to be paid to new solutions and perhaps generate hope and motivation where previously there might only have been scope for despair. The way in which we describe a situation sets the paths we are likely to follow, the technologies we use, the experts we call on, the theories we look to, the belief systems we use to empower and constrain our endeavour. In fast moving scenes we are often called to see things and do things differently. Sometimes so much so that we hanker for some sameness, for some stability, for some consolidation.

How should we greet the news that 680,000 children in Australia are living in households where no one has paid employment? (*The Age* 28/5/92). How should we react to the multitude of statements that young people in many areas are unlikely to find employment? Are there any motivational statements that will help, if mobilising action would also help? Export more, retire debt, correct the balance of payments appear to be ideas which have captured our leaders. Undoubtedly such things are important although one wonders whether the frame of reference generating them is the most useful to society and the planet. Are egalitarian ideals, a fair go for all and the common good sufficiently embedded in these schemes of things? Is sufficient attention being given to the timeliness of the results of these ideas? Might there be a need for short term, medium term and long term views to be developed?

Are there ideas and opportunities which individuals and families or other groups of people can take up as a means of addressing the problem and the malaise which accompanies it. One wonders in all this whether we are neglecting the importance and the strength of individual people, their families and households. To this observer it would seem

that the highs and lows of life are really lived out at this level. For sure it is important that events on the national and world stage are managed, for their impact is often great and crucial and all should be interested in them. Getting an act together on your own stage however must be the starting point. There may be merit in the idea that being a self sufficient contributor to a better world is a state to aspire to and part of that involves affording that opportunity to those around us as well. Helping people to help themselves and the world at large is an idea worth trying. One suspects that this must start by seeing everyone as a worthwhile contributor to everyday life, but especially oneself, with the talents, skills and strengths which each of us does possess. It happens where we are, at the local level. All great events happen at someone's local level.

The contributors to this issue are seeking to advance thinking and action in some remarkable ways. There is a strong sense of practice reality about each of their efforts, yet each is tackling problems of great proportion. One senses some of Jo Cavanagh's frustration as she tries to get us to see some of the blocks to our thinking and action in the substitute care field. After some years of practice in residential care and foster care in Australia, not to mention her direct experiments as a parent of four, she has taken many of her questions overseas to study them. Sometimes the process of looking at familiar problems in unfamiliar places enhances the generation of solutions. In her article on children and young people in out of home care Jo shares her experience with the field. Sally Castell-McGregor in the South Australian Children's Interest Bureau is now a veteran in advocacy territory. Her article draws attention to the way in which social arrangements can develop in size, weight and complexity to the degree that they impede sensible

humanity with potential implications of frightening proportions for the child. Children's rights now underpinned by the United Nations Convention are fostered by such local and individual advocacy work.

The research team from Queensland, Professor Norm Smith and his colleagues, Dr. R. Bland and Ms M. Hollingworth, have tackled the subject of disability and parenthood. This is an area much in need of attention from researchers and the team appear to have made a good start on it. Disability covers a very wide spectrum and touches many families. Given the challenges inherent in both coping with a disability and in parenting, there is a need for greater community recognition of the issues if we are aiming to build safe, supportive and responsive environments for developing children and for people who have to cope with or compensate for a disability while performing parenting roles. Max Kau, Trevor Carlyon and John Pearson provide a useful report on Kids Help Line, a telephone counselling service for children. Since work began on its establishment in 1990, a commitment to broad access and quality counselling backed by state of the art technology has had some remarkable results with promise of more to come. Crucial, however, is the appreciation of the particular needs such a service can meet and its interface with other local services. Technology enables access to ears and words in a unique and powerful way. Anonymity and autonomy in sorting some personal problems are in the hands of the callers and that seems to be something wanted and needed by a large number of Australian children in the experience of this project so far. Chris Goddard joins the bevy of writers directing attention at the far from anonymous Royal Family. In so doing he draws our notice to more of our abusive behaviour. Book reviews provide more perspectives on gender, violence and families. ♦

ADOPTION AUSTRALIA

A comparative study of adoption legislation and policy

by **Peter Boss**

with the assistance of
Sue Edwards

Introduction by the Hon. Justice Asche
Chief Justice of the Northern Territory

Published by the National Children's Bureau of Australia Inc. April 1992

This book provides the first comprehensive study of adoption legislation and policy in all eight adoption jurisdictions in Australia. The material is organised on a state by state and territory by territory basis under thirteen subject headings, which makes comparison between the jurisdictions easy to follow. In addition, there are chapters which provide an overview of adoption in Australia, past and present; a summary of the legislation; and a discussion on how it might match up with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The work has been prepared with a view to meeting the interests and needs of people who are or have been parties to an adoption; workers in the fields of adoption, social policy, welfare and social work; students in the human resources disciplines; family lawyers; policy shapers and makers.

The book can be used as a ready reference guide as well as giving a thorough appraisal of how adoption stands in our times. The National Children's Bureau has published this book from its own resources in the belief that it is necessary to provide objective coverage of a subject area which is complex to negotiate. It is also timely in view of the obligations laid upon Australia's legislation as a result of the recent ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

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