



Editorial

As time takes us further into the nineties, what will we encounter on the path ahead? What illumination will there be and what shadows will be cast on the interests of children? What forces will shape the way? At least the next two International Years should set an enlightening stage and some incentive to contemplate and address some matters of vital importance to children. The United Nations have declared 1993 The Year of Indigenous People and 1994 The Year of The Family.

The Year of Indigenous People should focus minds and hearts on heritage and identity. Impetus should be given to the growing appreciation of what can be learned from diverse cultural histories, traditions and skills. In the case of Australia, we will again be reminded of the need to go on attacking both the overt racism and the neglect borne of apathy and ignorance, still all too evident throughout the nation. But more, we can continue to appreciate the mounting evidence of the presence of remarkable social, environmental and artistic knowledge and skill. Attitudes, perspectives and skills in social relationships, connection with the land, collective wisdom and spirituality which will illuminate rather than darken the path. Often fragile in the face of the ethno-centricity, acquisitiveness and hedonism of other cultures, but precious to humankind for the long haul, we need the products of that long history to survive the clash. One hopes that the concentration of activity and attention, characteristic of these UN designated occasions, will allow for the recognition and preservation of heritage as a base for the best aspects of the cultures of today's Australians to back up our acceptance of domestic and global responsibility.

Volume 18 of *Children Australia* in 1993 will include contributions to our understanding from Aboriginal Australians. The final issue for 1992 will have a focus on events

across the Tasman and readers will become acquainted with some quite startling changes, including the marked impact of New Zealand's indigenous heritage and community on child welfare and juvenile justice policy, legislation and practice. Fundamental to the well being of children is the provision and protection of a safe, supportive and responsive social and physical place, in which they can belong and in which they can receive the necessary love, nurture, teaching and guidance to grow as partners, contributors and understanding citizens.

Looking further ahead to the following year our understanding and appreciation of the significance and role of the family will be promoted. Though form and features may vary, the family is universal in its importance to any individual and to the society of which it is inevitably a fundamental unit. Our relationship with it is simply part of being human, yet our full appreciation of it is sometimes limited by a tendency to take many aspects of it for granted. It seems too easy for its needs to be downgraded in affairs of the state, whilst simultaneously it is expected to shoulder heavy burdens. For the present, managers in corporations, both public and private, are rewarded for successful downsizing of their organisations. Ostensibly this change seeks to bring about a more productive society necessary to save us from economic disaster. The effects bear heavily on families.

For welfare practitioners it represents a marked shift away from universal service provision to categorical and residual service provision, an even greater problem if these services too are to be cut. A very serious problem that is, unless our thinking can be even more radical and we can find a way of developing lifestyles, in which our demand for wealth and power, ceases to rely on the destructive exploitation of others and remains within sustainable limits. Perhaps

the product of mergers and downsizing, euphemistically called 'outplacement' might be compared to the industrial waste, the atmospheric pollutants which corporations only three or four decades ago did not see as their responsibility. There is a big picture and caregivers without income have a difficult, if not impossible time of it, their necessities become a cost to the state and they may be lost as contributors to revenue. The family is a central player in all this activity - hopefully families will have the resilience to fight back.

The most recent issue of *Family Matters* (No. 32, 1992), the quarterly journal of the Australian Institute of Family Studies, in reporting on the Institute's excellent research program, demonstrates the continuing existence of extended family (Millward 1992: 14-19). Albeit in form and function a little different from the idealised version used by sociology to declare its loss, nevertheless it is there, taken for granted by most of us, misunderstood by generations of academics and punished by policy makers and politicians. Helpfully our understanding of its present nature and potential will continue to grow and that it will get a boost in 1994. In the meantime all stops should also be out to cushion the blows to it and support it in its crucial roles for children and others who depend on its health and viability. The nation's productivity is surely closely tied to families in their roles as producers and consumers, not to mention their importance as providers of pro-social identity, stimulation and security.

In the same issue of *Family Matters* (p 28-37), Don Edgar, in a paper commissioned by the United Nations, 'Conceptualising Family Life and Family Policies', puts forward a number of propositions about the nature of the family and its relationship to the market and the state. He proposes the need for the rejuvenation of some ideas about civil society, recognising that there are strengths and weaknesses in the functioning of the market, of the state, of the family, of the community which demand discussion of a central theme of moral obligation and social interdependence. 'If we were to see the rejuvenation and sustenance of the civil society as its goal [of family policy], we might cut through some of the dilemmas of modern democracy with its confused approach to independence, family autonomy, the role of the state versus the 'free market'.

That such concerns add to the burden of parents, practitioners in welfare and the law as well as children and young people themselves is all too evident in the articles selected for inclusion in this issue. Nigel Spence from New South Wales, contributes further to a theme raised previously in the journal about participation in case planning. His qualitative study of a number of case conferences draws attention to the way in which control is exercised, undoubtedly more will be said about this theme in forthcoming issues. The team from the Tea Tree Gully Action Group in South Australia have contributed the results of a survey of the parents of primary school children, essentially about sources of help for problems of children and parents. They show that for their respondents many of the features described by the Institute of Family Studies research do apply, people look first to their natural networks for help. Regrettably the response rate falls short of a level permitting generalisation of conclusions to the population at large, but the ideas put forward are very useful to share and much useful local information has been generated. Professor Frank Bates from Newcastle adds to the diet of students of the law with an article pointing up the disquieting challenges presented by some legal actions concerned with child sexual abuse. The territory is difficult for anyone responsible for dealing with it, practitioners in the law are no exception. Addressed however it must be, with frank firmness and sensitivity. Margaret Liddell presents material based on her own observations and a range of literature, mostly local, in relation to young women subject to statutory orders. The contradiction of over-intervention and under-support provides food for thought and action. These issues challenge legislators, agencies and practitioners and our models for intervening and responding. The author suggests that involvement is necessary and important but its form must accommodate the needs and views of the young women themselves.

Book reviews this time take us into some literature for children and a useful practice manual for the recruitment of care givers. Chris Goddard's *Point and Counterpoint*, with assistance from Ronald Biggs, draws attention to some of the vicissitudes of sentencing in the criminal justice system. How elusive justice appears to be? ♦

ADOPTION AUSTRALIA

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Introduction by the Hon. Justice Asche
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Published by the National Children's Bureau of Australia Inc. April 1992

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