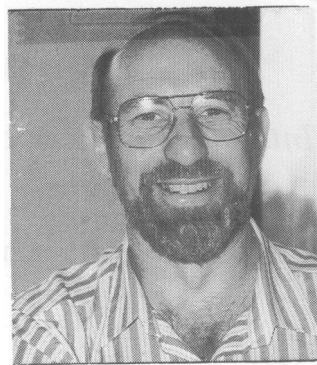


# Editorial

**I**t is a year for *Children Australia* to celebrate with enthusiasm and the best intellectual effort we can muster - the International Year of the Family. Evidence for the importance of the family for children is quite clear, providing both the place and many of the processes necessary for healthy physical, intellectual, emotional and social development. It should be a place of safety, succour and stimulation where from a secure base the developing child can test the talents and skills to be used in pursuing a life course - a place in which confidence grows, where responsibility and self reliance are encouraged, where hurts are mended and where the knowledge, social skills and roles for communality are established. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child sees the wellbeing of the child as intrinsically linked to the wellbeing and support of the family. In this year we have this as the focus for attention, and in keeping with the spirit of all the international years, should seek to make gains in policy, legislation and programs which impact on the family.



One subject for ongoing elucidation is the recognition of the many forms the family now takes - the changes in composition which occur over time and the complexities in the web of relationships connecting reciprocal rights and responsibilities. We live in times where customary and legal ties between adults are becoming more equitable but less frequently bear a stamp of permanency, whilst the law has moved to reassert the obligations of ongoing support for children on the part of birth parents. It is a time also when governments appear to be becoming more specific about how far the public purse will go to help families cope with private troubles. In many respects also, some of what were seen as private troubles have been exposed as so serious that they have been mandated as matters of public concern - things such as child abuse and domestic violence. Attention is frequently drawn to shortcomings in coverage and access to services at a time when economic stringency and restructuring have become the norm. As one observer puts it we are at the end of the age of certainty.

It is good that the family should be firmly in focus when roles are being reformed. All societal institutions must tailor their activities and their impact to strengthen and support the positive attributes of families, ensuring as well that the things which go wrong in the family are not compounded by external agencies, but redressed by a caring society. This means a role for business, for government and all other forms of association. There is ample evidence that parental overload, erratic or harsh discipline, cruel, passive or neglecting attitudes, or much parental conflict can often contribute to serious disturbances of conduct and emotion in children, who become victims and sometimes, in time, perpetrators. The need to support the good and act against the bad things in families were reflected in the adoption by the Council for IYF of nine key issues for consideration. These are:

1. To recognise the diversity of families in Australia in terms of their composition, culture and race, and to celebrate their vast contribution to Australia's social and economic welfare and cultural heritage;

2. To acknowledge the economic value of the caring and nurturing provided by families as part of general unpaid work in households and communities;

3. To strengthen the partnerships between families, governments, education and community services, business and community groups;

4. To develop more effective industrial relations policies to support the combinations of paid work and family responsibilities which increasing numbers of families are facing;

5. To promote gender equality issues and explore ways in which men and women can

share more equally in the various responsibilities and pleasures of family life;

6. To recognise the rights of families and of all family members, including children, young people and the elderly;

7. To address the circumstances and needs of disadvantaged families, including families with unemployed breadwinners, low paid working families, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, families in rural and remote regions and those in depressed economic regions, families of non-English speaking background, and families where a member has a disability or chronic illness;

8. To address the service needs of families facing personal crisis, including grief and loss, troubled relationships, alcohol and drug abuse and natural disasters;

9. To address the significant problems of family violence and abuse, including legislative initiatives, education and mediation, and the better provision of economic and social support for survivors of family violence.

(*Family Matters* December 1993)

Now is the time to ask 'How are we doing?' and ensure that as many shoulders as possible are behind the wheel.

In this issue, our contributors have provided a remarkable array of perspectives and interests. Terry Carney, Howard Bath, Julie Drury-Hudson, David Cherry and John Murphy all provide very experienced perspectives but startling in the diversity of the directions from which they come. Readers will find much to muse on, some things to challenge and some very practical advice.

Chris Goddard brings by way of an interview, a story of 'export to the colonies' - a sad story of lost family opportunities, of personal grief and loss, of survival in environments lacking in understanding, empathy and intimacy. There is also tenacity and resilience to be admired but in this article, and in Chris's other contribution, a follow up to the articles in the two previous issues on abuse within the education system, we see how stark the inability of adults to hear children can become. These stories serve as a reminder that a home should be a right for all - a safe place for the building of good memories, a place from which one should not feel the need to escape, and one from which an absence of rejection can always allow a return. It should be a place which translates to a community of interest providing support from without and comfort from within. ♦

Lloyd Owen