



EDITORIAL

One of the aims of *Australian Child and Family Welfare* is to encourage practitioners to write and share their experience with others. Descriptive papers, notable addresses and research papers are welcome. The quality of the developmental experience of children and encouragement and support available to their caregivers, has an obvious and crucial impact on today's society and the world of the future.

For all our sophistication in matters of business and technology, as a society, we seem to have barely begun when it comes to knowing definitively how to serve the best interests of the child. In complex areas of human activity such as intercountry adoption, changing family form, the administration of family law and the sexual abuse of children, it is apparent that the opinions of public and professionals can be readily mobilised and polarised around simplistic viewpoints. Sometimes the pendulum swings wildly as legislators endeavour to enact prevailing opinions.

In this case contributions from practitioners who have taken up the challenge of working and studying in such complex areas and writing about it are presented with pleasure. If the risks resulting from ill-informed decision making are to be narrowed such work is all the more important.

Research in the field of adoption generally has been limited to some extent by past approaches to record keeping and attitudes to sharing information among the parties involved. Much change has occurred and as Professor Hoksbergen makes plain, research in the area of intercountry adoption needs to influence practice which profoundly touches the lives of a large number of people. He outlines six major responsibilities for donor and receiving countries and the agencies within them and an obligation to evaluate the outcomes for the children involved. He draws attention to the "Declaration against abandonment and destitution of children in developing countries" announced in New Delhi in 1985 and its implications for taking the thesis "in the best interests of the child" seriously.

Two articles draw attention to a remarkable institution, the Family Court of Australia, which in its second decade of operation is still surrounded by considerable controversy. While Neville Turner draws attention to the struggles of the legal profession around the form of the Court, Judith Reuben gives a penetrating account of the busy and difficult day to day work of the Family Court Counselling Service. The court and its counselling service have a profound impact on the lives of many Australians. There would be value in reflecting further on the progress and functioning of the three remarkable products of federal family legislation of the mid seventies; the Family Court, the Counselling service and the Institute of Family Studies. All face difficult charters in matters of fundamental importance to Australian children and their caregivers.

As John Wilson indicates in his article on working with single fathers, the Australian Institute of Family Studies estimates that 40% of Australian marriages will end in divorce and that 60% of these will involve dependent children. That in 1982 there were 427,000 dependent children living in one parent households. As with many gender issues, some discomfort might be attached to the Australian culture absorbing the fact that single fathers represent a growing group of primary caregivers. The strong emphasis on self reliance which John found among his research subjects provides some interesting food for thought.

The prominence of housing, as well as gender among contemporary issues of importance are reinforced in Hayward's review of Sophie Watson's book *Accommodating Inequality* in the book review section of this issue.

Finally in this issue Chris Goddard picks up the difficulty arising from differing definitions, or lack of the definition of the term 'substantiation' in the area of child sexual abuse. What does it mean in terms of the helping professions facing the dilemmas of practice in child protection and their impact on the exploitation of children?