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EDITORIAL

In July 1988 the Melbourne Age ran a media campaign highlighting the problems of child abuse. This much needed and timely campaign illustrated the frightening situation with regard to lack of adequate protection for children who are at risk. It also drew attention to the lack of adequate preventative programs and support for all children and the lack of support for families in the very structure of society. Child abuse is not something which happens in a vacuum, nor is it something for which blame can be placed solely upon the abusing individual. However, whatever the cause, the need for protection of the child must be the priority of responsibility for society. And at the present time it is difficult to see where this protection exists. The media campaign was useful in drawing attention to this situation. However, what is most depressing about such campaigns is that they tend to get caught up in opposing ideologies or attacks on particular programs and the essential issues of lack of community support for adequate resources and structural changes to protect the children are lost. Also lost is the need for more Australian research, not only into the cause of abuse, about which we have a great deal of information, but of research into what programs work (both remedial and preventative) for which children. Assuming that one interventive approach should work for all seems simplistic at the best. We already have the infra structure of government welfare, health, and selfhelp organizations which, if they kept in mind their primary mission and were adequately resourced could provide protection for children. If programs which are currently seen to be effective could be adequately funded and such programs could be guaranteed funding for a specific number of years—part of their operation could include rigorous research (not simply evaluation) so that we continue to build knowledge of who and what children and families are helped by certain programs. If we had more knowledge about the efficacy of particular programs we would have to rely less on impressions and emotional justifications and more on demonstrated effectiveness of various programs. No one working in the area of child protection is confident of having all the solutions to the problem. But we do have knowledge that in certain situations or for certain children and families there are programs that do work. Those programs need to be made accessible to children at risk. In addition most of those working in the area would be confident that resources and structural changes directed towards eliminating child poverty are necessary and that these will cost the community financially. The question is whether the community is prepared to shoulder these costs. Or, put another way - how important are the children?

M.F