

PROJECT SPEAKOUT

An ongoing project started in N.S.W. during IYC

THE IDEA

The Project is based on a project conducted in Britain, where children in care were invited by the National Children's Bureau in London to attend a one day conference in 1975 to talk about matters of special concern to them. A group of children who attended the conference eventually published a book called "Who Cares? Young People in Care Speak Out"* which reported on residential care as the children saw it. This book is locally available, and prompted the idea that a similar project might be carried out in New South Wales during the International Year of the Child. Information was sought and readily obtained from the National Children's Bureau in London about the "Who Cares" project.

THE N.S.W. VERSION

The Project is a joint project by the Department of Youth and Community Services and the Association of Child Caring Agencies (representing the non-Government sector).

The Project in New South Wales has 2 major aims:

1. To offer young people in care the opportunity to talk together about their experiences of life in care, encouraging them to use constructively the product of their joint discussions in whatever ways they see as necessary.
2. To provide opportunity for personal growth and development for the children involved, by encouraging them to take responsibility for both planning and action.

THE COMMITTEE

The N.S.W. proposal differed from the British Project, in that instead of adults organising a Conference to which children were invited, it was decided to invite the children themselves, tell them about the British Project, and ask them whether they would like a similar opportunity to speak out . . . if so, what form they wished it to take and how would they do it?

* Edited by Raissa Page & G.A. Clark. 1977. Nat Children's Bureau, London.

Two "sponsoring houses" were chosen — a Government establishment caring for 16 secondary school boys, and a non-government Catholic home catering for the same number of secondary school girls. Staff and children in both homes responded enthusiastically, and over a series of meetings plans began to take shape.

THE 1ST PLAN — THE CAMP

The young people decided a one day Conference was not enough — but that a weekend camp for about 100 young people of secondary school age from different homes throughout the State would be a good starting point for further activities.

Young people from the Committee visited many of the homes and spoke to the children about "Project Speakout", and invited them to nominate and send two or more representatives to Camp Speakout. Other homes were approached by letter.

The young people then planned the programme of the weekend, in such a way to continue firm and serious discussion in ways which would suit young people of their age. They drew up a list of possible issues and areas for discussion, planned recreational and social activities.

The slogan "CARE FOR KIDS IN CARE" was chosen and the logo drawn by one of the young people, and stickers were printed.

"Camp Speakout" was held at Vision Valley, June 22-24, 1979.

Over 30 children's homes were represented by 100 young people on the weekend camp. Children came from many country areas — Lismore, Albury, Armidale, Mittagong, Bathurst, Orange, The Hunter and Metropolitan Region.

The children were divided into groups of 8, accompanied by 2 adults whose role was to facilitate rather than lead discussion. The leaders were mainly from child caring agencies and professions. The discussion groups were recorded on tape or paper and there

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was also video available. There were 3 meetings of the small groups, and several meetings including the final session, of all the young people. Before the final session on Sunday, representatives came together from all groups to identify common areas of concern and to make recommendations for changes and list tasks to be undertaken. Some of the children presented these at the final session; there was also a play, put on by one group on the theme of foster care which was enthusiastically received.

Some of the many topics discussed at the Camp were the Rights of Children in care, size of children's homes, fostering, leaving the home, food, school experiences, discipline, clothing and pocket money.

THE "CAMP SPEAKOUT" RECOMMENDATIONS are summarised below:

1. To educate the public about children's homes and why kids are there.
2. To write a booklet for kids in homes about their rights.
3. For each home to form councils with kids, with power to make decisions.
4. To form a committee that assists kids to contact family members.
5. To look into the relationship of kids in homes and houseparents.
6. To set up a taskforce/support group to look into the support and rights of older kids in homes, those about to leave and those who have left the home.
7. To set up an advocate for kids to speak on their behalf (especially to bureaucracies).
8. To write up a report on PROJECT SPEAKOUT beginning with the Camp.
9. To produce an Ongoing Newsletter for Kids in Homes.

ACTION SINCE CAMP SPEAKOUT

A number of children at the camp were interested in working on particular tasks and several ongoing working groups have been formed:

A) "Educating the Public" Group

It was a major concern to the children at the camp that the general community often thought of the "kids from the home" as bad — simply because they were in a home. This group has undertaken the task of educating the Public. They used the play presented at Camp Speakout — called "Fosties Supermarket" and developed it to include aspects of life in residential care as identified in the discussions at the camp. This play was then performed at — Australian Foster Care Conference (1-5 September) — during Children's Week (N.S.W.) (26 October) and at the Youth Forum, 12-14 September. The play has been well received and it is hoped to video it.

B) The Newsletter and Editors Group

This group has already produced the first Speakout Newsletter which has been sent to all Children's homes in New South Wales. The Newsletter included the children's views on Camp Speakout, views about life in care, and news items of interest to children in care. It is hoped that the children will continue to contribute their views and that the Newsletter will become a regular one, written by children in care.

This group will also be involved in the production of the full report from Camp Speakout.* Other tasks for the future are a pamphlet for young people in homes on their Rights and a pamphlet for the community regarding Children in Care.

C) The 16+ Group

This group has been formed to look at the general needs of young people leaving homes. This was an area of particular concern to the young people at the camp. It is also hoped to include in the group, young people who have already left children's homes.

FUNDING

Project Speakout was approved as an I.Y.C. project by the I.Y.C. Secretariat N.S.W., and a grant of \$8,000 was made available. \$5,000 was obtained from the Schools Commission "Children in Institutions" funding, and this covered the costs of the Speakout Camp. Staff involved in the project from the two sponsoring agencies have been permitted to donate considerable time to the project, so that the funds available can be used in expenses directly related to the project — transport, accommodation of young people, printing, videoing etc.

FOR INFORMATION

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* The full Report of CAMP SPEAKOUT will be available in the New Year and copies of this Report and the Newsletter can be ordered from the "PROJECT SPEAKOUT" C/- ACCA P.O. Box 2244, North Parramatta 2151.