



Editorial

The protection of children — whose responsibility and how can they be protected — is the theme of this issue. It is sad we cannot assume that our society will give children protection as a matter of course.

From the reaction of the media it appears that it is easier to raise world-wide concern about baby seals than it is to raise concern about children. When the international community sees pictures of brutal hunts for baby seals, the outcry leads to calls for trade bans and other sanctions. A picture of starving children causes sympathy and perhaps some individual donations. But if the children's suffering is not tied to a political concern, or something similar, the resultant action from the publicity is usually negligible relative to the problem. So, for thousands of children in the world who are starving or suffering under negative or unenlightened policies, there can be no expectation of international sanctions to provoke action to help them. The children of Lebanon or Afghanistan are not newsworthy, just innocent victims.

Why can't society protect these children? Is it that there is no real agreement in our society that children should be protected? Perhaps they have become just another group like the unemployed, whose fate it is to suffer, as the society works to improve itself.

Do policy makers agree on the objective of child protection? Are they and are we prepared to meet the costs that reaching that goal may mean? The answers seem to lie in the negative. Even with people closely concerned with family and child welfare there is often wide disagreement as to the objective of child welfare policies, and there is certainly disagreement about the ways needed to give children protection. Once policies start to be discussed politics influence definitions and processes. There needs to be a universal 'no man's land' in which policies which truly promote the welfare and protection of children are promoted.

However for those concerned with the welfare of children there does seem to be agreement on the need for strong institutional policies. Yet at the moment, we have residual programmes which have the task of trying to provide general protection, when their proper role is that of a safety net. There certainly is a need for residual programmes as well as unusual ones. It is Utopian to suggest that universal policies will mean that the needs of all children and families will be met. A problem occurs when the safety net becomes the major focus and the universal policies and associated infrastructure are not there to provide necessary support.

In this issue we look at residual programmes and policies both in Australia and the United States of America.

Jill Volard explores the issue of providing appropriate care for children who cannot stay with their own families. Foster care, which can provide a second home for children, requires that the foster parents have an ability to provide nurture. The author investigates characteristics of foster parents in an attempt to identify who undertakes foster care.

Phillip Swain and Frederick Ahearn look at child protective policies and programmes in the U.S.A. Phillip Swain compares the U.S.A. programme with the Victorian system. Frederick Ahearn reports on the effectiveness of Demonstration projects in Massachusetts.

Due to a printing error, Vol. 7, No. 4 was numbered Vol. 8, No. 1. In order not to add to further confusion, this issue is numbered Vol. 8, No. 2.

You may also have noticed that gremlins have been creeping into our copy. We now hope we have caught them all.

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