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Editorial

William Ryan begins his book "Blaming the Victim" with an anecdote. A U.S.A. Senator, participating in an enquiry regarding the Japanese invasion of Pearl Harbor, asked with accusation "And what was Pearl Harbor doing in the Pacific?"

It is perhaps salutary to consider that at times our services to children and families may reflect the attitude contained in this humorous comment. That is, we have tended to blame people for not using services provided rather than asking if the services are appropriate and/or accessible. This blame has not been direct, but has been seen in the slow development of innovative services relevant to the needs of particular groups of people.

The articles in this issue, which is sponsored by the Office of Child Care, do demonstrate a diversity of service approaches. This diversity recognises both the common and unique needs of children and families. The implementation of programmes and recognition of the difficult and complex issues involved in the protection of children and improvement in the quality of life is another focus. It is apparent that the task of the policy maker and service provider requires tremendous knowledge and skill.

The issue of the rights and responsibilities of the professional worker, and parent and the child is a complex and confusing area. It is recognised that it is the responsibility of the worker to have in depth knowledge of his area of practice and to work with parents and children to develop new knowledge. This new knowledge in turn can be employed to enrich the experience for the child and family.

Although innovation and diversity are being encouraged in funding and other initiatives, it is also important to recognise that appropriate services may still not be available to all Australian children. Indeed, one needs only to look at the latest report on the health of aboriginal children in Victoria to recognise that there are Australian children still not receiving even basic health care.

We also need to look outside Australia. At the present time, refugee families from Afghanistan are having to move from their homes into the poorest parts of Pakistan. We need to ask if they have available to them services which would improve their quality of life. We need also to ask whether they are allowed to participate in decisions which are affecting their destiny. It is likely that the answer to both questions would be "No". In another area of the world, Cubato, Brazil, we know that 80,000 people are living in an environment of atmospheric pollution which statistics have demonstrated is incapable of supporting human life. Still births and infant deaths support the statistics, but some children do manage to live and face what life they can in this environment.

It is essential that we work to develop policies which support children and their families in Australia, and that we work towards extending this support to Third World countries. Our actions to improve quality of life for Australian children cannot be blind to the needs of all children.

Why comment on this situation in this issue? Firstly, because it brings to our awareness the needs and horrifying conditions of children and families both within Australia and in other countries. This knowledge can demonstrate to us that we cannot allow ourselves to grow complacent. Knowledge of these situations reminds us that we have the responsibility to work at all levels for an improved quality of life for all. We live in an increasingly technologically sophisticated society. However, as yet we have not been able to adequately address the fact that there is a high quality of life for many but many others suffer.

Margarita Frederico

ERRATA:

Apologies to Ms. Wendy Barnaby, for misspelling her name in Vol. 4. No. 4.

M. Mystul is the author of "Step in Australia", Vol. 5, Nos. 1 & 2.

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