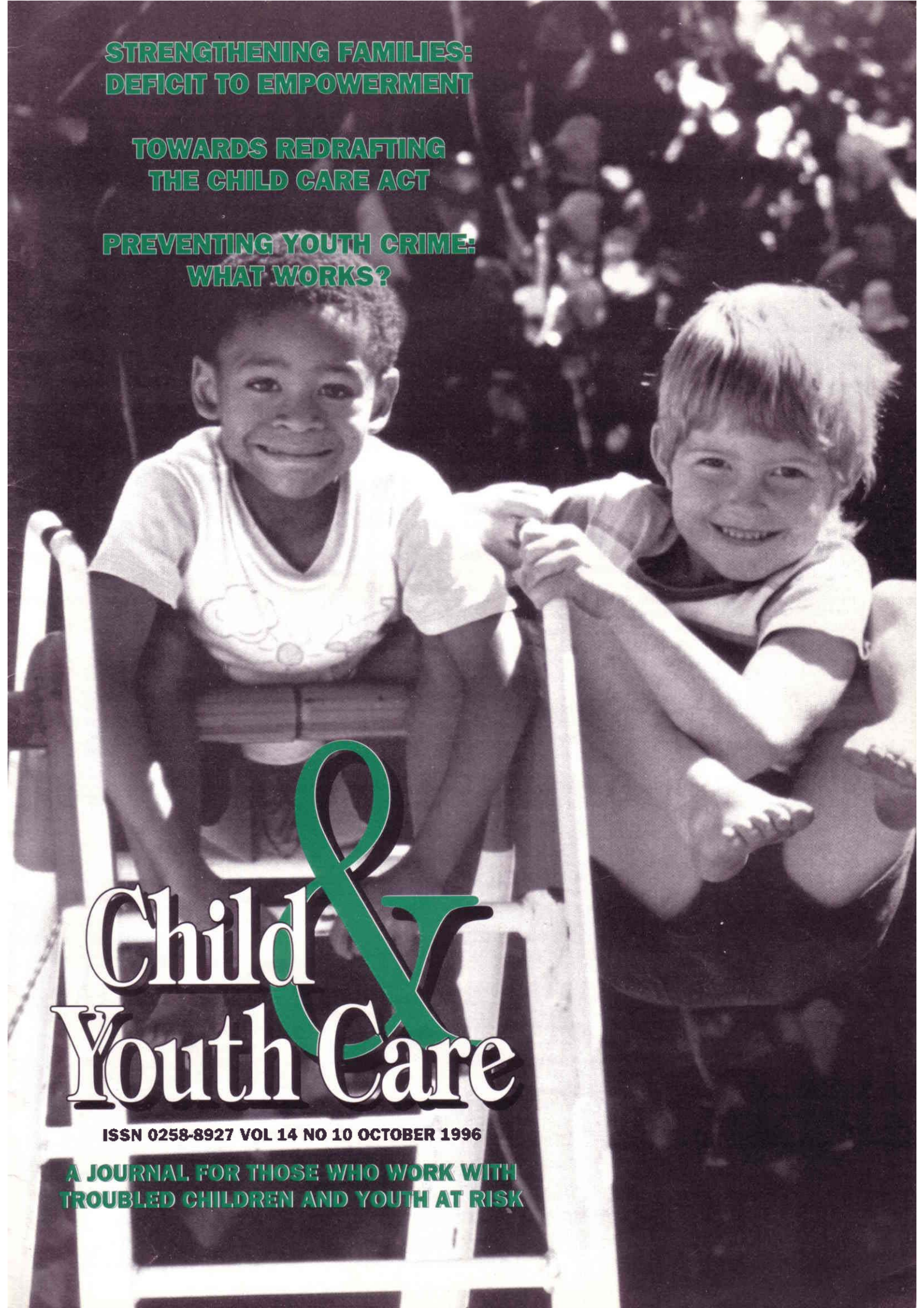


**STRENGTHENING FAMILIES:  
DEFICIT TO EMPOWERMENT**

**TOWARDS REDRAFTING  
THE CHILD CARE ACT**

**PREVENTING YOUTH CRIME:  
WHAT WORKS?**



**Child & Youth Care**

ISSN 0258-8927 VOL 14 NO 10 OCTOBER 1996

**A JOURNAL FOR THOSE WHO WORK WITH  
TROUBLED CHILDREN AND YOUTH AT RISK**



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# Children, Values and the Rainbow Nation

We live in a time of the most extraordinary contradictions. So much that child care workers, social service practitioners in general and concerned citizens of all persuasions have called for in the interests of children, is now enshrined in our Constitution, and also in our nation's formal commitment to a range of national and international agreements relating to the betterment of the lives of children.

The NPA, PPA's and all manner of associated strategies are up in lights, with the full backing of our President who has taken up the cause of children so wholeheartedly.

And yet this is a time when, perhaps as never before, children's services and a range of provisions for children are weakening and crumbling. How can it be so, in the New South Africa at this very time when our dreams of a better life for all, especially for the children, are supposed to be taking concrete shape?

**Needs and resources**

None of us can fail to have understanding for the particular difficulties faced by government at this time.

A huge national debt inherited from the days of apartheid, the servicing of which takes up a slice of the budget second only to education; a massive redistribution challenge given the abysmal or nonexistent state of basic services to the majority of the population, and a fragile economy are but a few of the features of the backdrop against which government must plan and finance essential services for children and families.

Increasing the national debt would be highly irresponsible we certainly do not want government to further impoverish our country and mortgage our children's future. There are clearly no easy solutions and it is far easier to criticise government from outside than to grapple with these issues successfully from within.

**Closing the gap**

And yet we surely have an obligation to keep the pressure on those who hold the national purse-strings to close the gap between

the national rhetoric about commitment to children's wellbeing on the one hand and the realities facing essential children's services on the other.

This gap is presently assuming intolerable proportions. We are speaking of family preservation and the ending of commercial sexual exploitation of children and other forms of child labour but the Lund Committee, comprising people with deep concerns about such issues, was able (within the constraints presented by the treasury) to recommend only a tiny grant – and only for very young children – with nothing at all for the support of destitute caregivers.

**The cost of cost-saving**

We are talking about a commitment to adoption and foster care as community-based preventive and developmentally oriented forms of provision for children, while the agencies delivering these services and charged with the placement of abandoned babies are cutting back their staff.

The babies are lying in hospitals becoming emotionally damaged (and incidentally costing the health care system far more than is being saved by the welfare system by failing to ensure family care for them). And this is before the crisis of children left destitute when the lives of their caregivers are claimed by AIDS has begun to make its full appearance. We are talking about a grand new vision for all forms of residential child care, while precisely those organisations which have been trying to implement the principles of this vision are being required to drop their standards or close their doors. We talk about early childhood education as the bedrock of lifelong learning and as crucial for the prevention of all manner of ills, but educare centres in some impoverished areas are threatened with closure due to subsidy cutbacks.

**Starting points**

The solutions are not clear but we have to find them. What is absolutely certain is that we cannot afford not to invest heavily in our children. All our strivings to rebuild our country will come to naught if we do not place the chil-

**“We are talking about a grand new vision for all forms of residential child care, while precisely those organisations which have been trying to implement the principles of this vision are being required to drop their standards or close their doors.”**

dren at the centre of these endeavours.

There are at least a few clear starting points which we could recommend to government.

In the first place, it would be very hard to argue that we need flocks of fighter helicopters more than we need programmes to strengthen family life and provide proper care for children.

We may need to protect our fisheries but does that really require wars costing millions of rands? And of paramount importance is that government take the lead in reversing the culture of greed and grabbing which is tearing our social fabric apart. Let the parliamentarians, the high-ranking departmental official, the Public Protector, and members of commissions who have had large increases allocated to them, give these back and put them into children's services. This would not only free up money, it would provide healthy role-modelling of the kind we desperately need if we are to build true stability and security for our children.

— Jackie Loffell  
*Johannesburg Child Welfare Society*

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# Child & Youth Care

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**VOLUME 14 NUMBER 10 OCTOBER 1996**

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*Cover Picture: Acknowledgement to Leon Maresch for Molo Songololo*



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Association Internationale des Educateurs de Jeunes Inadaptés  
International Association of Workers with Troubled Children



National Association of Child Care Workers  
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## People



**Sabitha Samjee** entered the field of child and youth care work out of curiosity twenty-one years ago. At school she had a close friend who lived at Lakehaven Children's Home, and having been brought up in the area and always wondering about the life at the children's home she, along with her husband, applied to become houseparents at Lakehaven. She was put in charge of eighteen children, boys and girls, aged from 2 years to 18 years. This was rather a culture shock to her, specially since her position was more that of housekeeper than houseparent. Sabitha remained in this position for two years and during this time she did a correspondence course offered at Wits — The National Certificate in Child Care. She then went into a non-residential post as an on-line relief worker for a couple of years before a full-time vacancy arose as an off-line worker in the administration side at Lakehaven. This also broadened her experience as she had to deal with the day-to-day tasks like transporting children to the doctor, issuing clothes, logging details, etc.

### Work with children

She missed dealing with the children directly, though, and soon became involved in programme planning and in group work sessions with the children. During these years all training was from in-house courses, run by the principal and social

worker. It was at this time, under the guidance of Bala Mudaly, Director of Lakehaven, that she began to realise that child and youth care was not just a job but a tremendously challenging profession. Bala was an inspirational leader with tremendous vision. Sabitha recalls that he changed the old concept of houseparents to that of child and youth care worker, and also introduced the position of single careworker. Her remaining five years at Lakehaven were as principal child and youth care worker.

### Courses

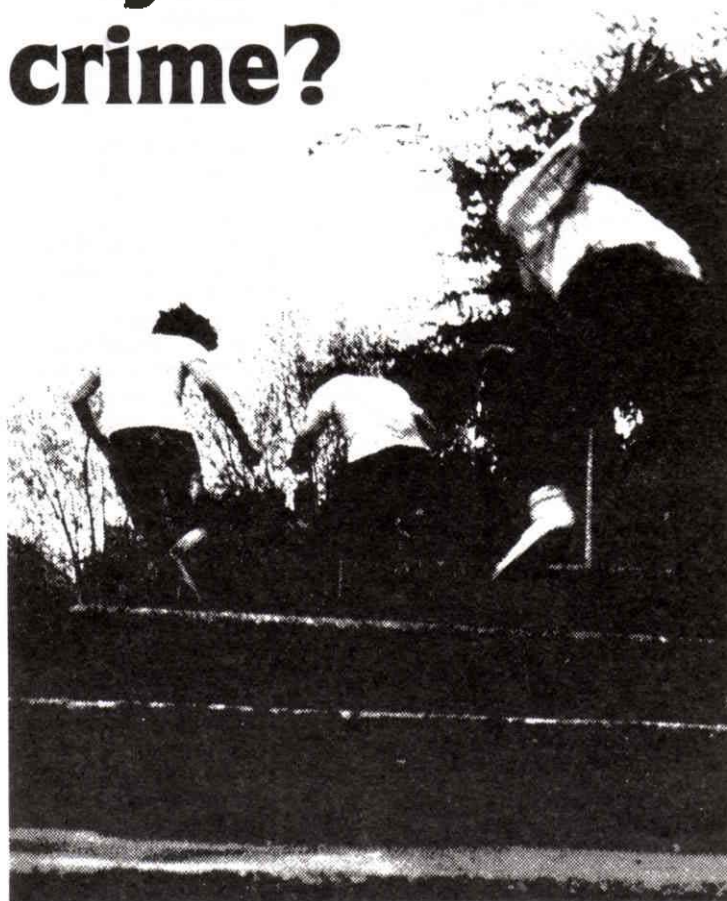
When NACCW started running courses in Natal during these years, Sabitha attended them all. She was one of the first students to complete the BQCC under Lesley du Toit. She also did many short courses and accomplished another first by being the first Natal student to complete the DCCA. At the same time Sabitha was a volunteer worker for Umtapo Information Centre, which has pioneered adult literacy. She trained for this work in Botswana and that background aided her in adult education work, focussing on life experiences as a valuable knowledge base. Through Umtapo and the South African Association for Literacy and Adult Education (SAALAE), she was chosen in February 1994 to represent South Africa as part of a research team for the African continent. She spent a month in the Sudan studying their programmes. Sudan, although a third world country, has achieved a 100% literacy rate. In August 1995 Sabitha joined NACCW as a trainer on a contract, basis and she is hoping soon to put another first on her chart — to be accepted as a candidate for the degree in Child and Youth Care.



What do we learn from others' experience in dealing with juvenile crime? America has been attempting to solve its crime problem with one arm behind its back, suggests this report. For over a decade, the nation has pursued essentially a one-track strategy for attacking crime: "lock-'em-up." Through mandatory sentences, reduced plea bargaining, restricted parole, and the construction of hundreds of thousands of new prison cells, their nation has more than doubled the number of prisoners behind bars. Yet crime rates have not plummeted, and violent crime remains persistently high. "Make no mistake: Our society has a vital stake in incarcerating serious, violent, chronic criminals. But given the tremendous costs associated with building a spate of new prisons and housing hundreds of thousands of additional prisoners, relying only on increased incarceration to eliminate our persistent crime epidemic flies in the face of evidence and logic."

In this report **Richard A. Mendel** takes a hard-headed look at youth-oriented anti-crime programmes to discover ...

# What works in the prevention of youth crime?



This report reviews the facts underlying the delinquency debate — the wealth of scholarly evidence on the causes and correlates of delinquency and existing research examining how well various approaches to crime succeed in practice.

Is there a strong rationale for such programs as family therapies, recreation and midnight sports leagues and school-based conflict resolution to prevent or decrease delinquent behaviour by youth? Do these programs actually make a cost-effective contribution to controlling crime? Or, rather, is there merit to the critiques that depict prevention efforts as naive, soft-headed, even counterproductive?

## Cold reality

By examining these questions carefully, policy makers can govern more wisely on crime. Advocates, reporters, and other interested observers can influence policy makers to conduct the next crime debate on the basis of cold reality rather than colourful rhetoric.

What is the cold reality about crime and crime prevention? A hard-headed look at the evidence reveals several lessons:

Research provides a strong foundation for identifying risk factors early in life, which enables us to address the underlying conditions that propel some youth to crime.

The road to violence begins in childhood. Criminologists have long known that a relative handful of serious chronic offenders are responsible for the majority of crime in America. Research documents that violent chronic offenders are most active during their teen years. Their paths to violence almost always begin with serious behavioural problems in early childhood. While most children who exhibit poor conduct right themselves rather than embark on a life of crime, those who do become chronic offenders typically follow well-worn pathways toward increasingly serious criminality.

Research identifies many risk factors that contribute to youths' propensity for violence and delinquency. Crime-prone youth are more likely to come from families where parents are abusive or neglectful, provide harsh or erratic discipline, or exhibit marital discord. They tend to live in communities rife with drugs, crime, guns, and poverty, where positive role models and safe, constructive recreational opportunities are scarce. They are likely to associate with

peers who are delinquent or drug-abusing or to participate in youth gangs. In many cases they are "tracked" at school into classes dominated by low-achieving and trouble-making students.

Several individual characteristics — such as hyperactivity, attention deficit disorder, low intelligence — have been linked to delinquency. The presence or lack of self-control, problem-solving skills, and beliefs condemning violence have been identified as key determinants of criminality. Other personal factors — a strong and sustained relationship with at least one adult, an even temperament, and an ability to evoke positive responses in others — have been identified as "protective factors" that can help insulate even high-risk youth from the danger of falling into delinquency. Prevention can address the risks facing many children while boosting protective factors, making them less likely to become delinquent.

Tougher law enforcement and stricter sanctions are unlikely, in the absence of effective crime prevention, to reduce crime significantly.

Throughout the crime debate of 1994, prevention critics urged that scarce taxpayer dollars go for prison construction to eradicate what they called "revolving door justice" — lenient sentencing and easy parole for serious crimes.

Yet recent experience throughout America proves that incarcerating more criminals for longer periods does not necessarily reduce crime or increase public safety. Between 1975 and 1989, the expected prison time for committing a violent crime nearly tripled. Yet violent crime rates did not decrease dramatically. Between 1980 and 1992 California spent \$3.8 billion on prison construction to more than quadruple its prison population, giving it the largest prison population in America and second highest *per capita* incarceration rate. Yet California's crime rate did not fall — either in absolute terms or relative to other states. This results from both the failure of deterrence and the impotence of incarceration. For deterrence to work, would-be offenders must be rational in their decision-making and determined to avoid prison. Most crimes are committed in the heat of the moment, however, often under the influence of drugs or alcohol. In many inner city communities, impulsive behaviour and a predisposition to violence are the norm, and they may be the immediate, automatic response to any tense situation. Increasingly in tough, urban neighbourhoods, prison time is viewed less as a hallmark of shame than as a badge of honour or even a rite of passage.

A second argument for increased incarceration is to take dangerous felons off the streets. Here too, the public safety benefits are limited. The vast majority of crimes committed in America each year (31 million out of 34 million, experts say) go either unreported or unsolved. Though locking up more of those convicted for longer periods can keep some criminals off the streets, many more will continue to roam free. Also,

research reveals that the criminal careers of most chronic offenders span only a few years — beginning in the teen years, tapering off steadily during the 20s, and plummeting in the 30s. By the time most criminals have compiled records serious enough to warrant long prison terms, their criminal activity has long since passed its peak.

**"Neither traditional psychotherapy nor behaviour modification has shown great promise as a vehicle for redirecting delinquent and criminal youth. A few efforts — mostly scare-oriented programs or programs that place groups of delinquent youth together for extended treatment — have actually worsened the behaviour of participants."**

#### **Impressive results**

A number of youth-oriented prevention strategies have documented impressive results in reducing criminal, delinquent, and pre-delinquent behaviour among young people.

Any doubt that prevention programs can reduce crime are dispelled by several carefully evaluated programs providing intensive assistance to children and their families in the first five years of life. The best known of these is the Perry Pre-school program in Ypsilanti, Michigan, forerunner to the present day Head Start program. Long-term follow-up revealed that at age 27, more than 20 years after completing the program, only seven percent of Perry participants had been arrested five or more times, compared with 35 percent of a control group. Family intervention programs have also shown dramatic impact on criminality. Only six percent of participants in a day care assistance and home visiting program in Syracuse, New York were ever processed in juvenile court — versus 22 percent of youth assigned randomly to a control group.

#### **Reaching youth before trouble starts**

Many delinquency prevention programs targeted to older children and adolescents have not been implemented on a broad scale. Most that have been tried have typically operated on meagre budgets and without careful evaluation.

Nonetheless, the record reveals that several prevention strategies including both "pure prevention" aimed at the general youth population and "targeted treatment" for those already engaged in problem behaviours do indeed divert youth from the pathways to crime. Included among them are:

#### **Community-wide Prevention Initiatives**

Most impressive of the pure prevention

efforts are multipronged prevention initiatives designed and implemented by entire communities, particularly those that build on the strengths and interests of youth rather than focusing only on youths' problems and deficits:

- Through its "Success Through Academic and Recreational Support" (STARS) program for high risk youth ages 11-14, Fort Myers, Florida, reduced its juvenile crime rates by almost one-third. Among 11 and 12-year-old offenders city-wide, the rate of repeat criminal behaviour dropped 64.3 percent.

- Crime went down 60 percent in two troubled Lansing, Michigan, neighbourhoods after police, local schools, and a social service agency opened a neighbourhood network centre and launched an extensive youth development program.

- Norfolk, Virginia, forged a partnership between police, human service agencies, and local citizens to combat crime in ten high crime neighbourhoods. The initiative — which included new youth athletic leagues and a Youth Forum for teens to speak on community problems as well as other prevention measures — led to a 29 percent drop in crime in the targeted neighbourhoods and a city-wide reduction in violent crime.

- San Antonio, Texas, has employed a variety of initiatives including after-school programs and penalties against youth (and their parents) for carrying weapons, painting graffiti, or violating youth curfews in an anti-crime partnership between community residents and police. In the program's first year, arrests for juvenile crime dropped by ten percent and juvenile victimization fell by 50 percent.

#### **Multi-Dimensional Violence Prevention in Schools**

Conflict resolution and violence prevention curricula have swept the nation in recent years. Several programs have documented impacts on students' beliefs and conflict resolution skills and on students' self-reported behaviour. The best of these programs reach beyond the classroom into the entire school and the broader community.

#### **Recreation Programs**

Though midnight basketball became the brunt of many a rhetorical attack, leagues have been spreading rapidly across the country in recent years — often with active support from local law enforcement agencies. Particularly when they require participation in life skills workshops and other constructive activities as a prerequisite for playing, these leagues have helped to bring down crime rates in sponsoring communities. The original league in Glenarden, Maryland, is credited with reducing crime by 60 percent. In the Winton Hills section of Cincinnati, crime rates plummeted 24 percent within 13 weeks after a late night recreation program was initiated.

Other recreation and youth development activities can be equally effective. Researchers at Columbia University found that the presence of a Boys & Girls Club in a public housing project reduced crime



rates by 13 percent and drug use by more than 20 percent.

Resolving Conflicts Creatively (RCC), a Brooklyn, New York-based program, combines violence prevention classes with peer mediation and parent training to change the total school environment. In one early evaluation, 70 percent of teachers involved in the program reported that RCC reduced fighting among participating students. Teens, Crime, and the Community, a national curriculum, challenges students to examine and act on real crime issues and take preventive action. It has been shown to improve students' attitudes and knowledge and to reduce their likelihood of delinquency.

### Treating Troubled Youth

Prevention can work. Particularly when communities come together to offer youth a continuum of programs and services, and provide youth the opportunity for supportive and sustained relationships with caring adults, and the chance to assume constructive roles in the community, the effect on youth can be appreciable. But these purely preventive efforts do not deal with youth already in trouble. The majority of crimes are committed by a relative handful of repeat offenders who typically display serious behaviour problems in early childhood. For them, more intensive, individualized treatment will likely be required. What is the record of treatment or intervention programs in redirecting troubled youth? Though some types of treatment have proven to be far more effective than others, the overall answer can be summed up in two words: "quite promising."

### Family Therapies

The most impressive interventions focus on the families of troubled youth — even youth with serious behaviour problems. One approach, multi-systemic family therapy (MST) reduced rearrest rates among incarcerated youth by almost half. Youths who received MST spent an average of 73 fewer days behind bars in the year following treatment than did youths in a control group.

Other family interventions have also shown dramatic results. When Parent Management Training (PMT) was provided to parents of problem children ages 3-8, the children fared far better than a control group of children assigned to a waiting list for the program. Overall, between two-thirds and three-fourths of the PMT children achieved clinically significant change and returned to a normal range of behavioural functioning. PMT has also been found effective with adolescents — even those with serious juvenile crime records.

### Cognitive Training

Another set of promising intervention programs aims to develop in troubled youth the social and cognitive skills necessary to avoid conflict and control aggression. Children raised in strong families, quality schools, and healthy communities typically develop these skills as a matter of course.

Among high risk and delinquent youth they are often lacking. Research shows that focused training in social problem-solving, anger management, moral reasoning and perspective-taking can make a significant difference both with children displaying early signs of delinquency and with youth already incarcerated for serious offences. These programs can be delivered for only a small fraction of the cost of incarcerating offenders in juvenile or adult prisons; the best programs have demonstrated the capacity to reduce crime rates.

The Positive Adolescent Choices Training (PACT) program teaches negotiation, compromise, and a variety of anger management skills to troubled African American adolescents. A recent study showed that only 18 percent of PACT participants were referred to juvenile court in the three years after training compared with 49 percent of a randomly assigned control group.

A number of other treatment approaches have also been shown to reduce criminality. Providing delinquent youth intensive contact with college student volunteers under the guidance of graduate students and university faculty has proved successful in several tests. Youthful offenders ordered to pay restitution to their victims or perform service to the community have lower recidivism rates than those for whom restitution or service is not ordered. Sentencing juveniles to appropriate correctional programs, based in the community whenever possible, rather than only to "training schools" or other large-scale detention facilities has proved a cost-effective strategy in Massachusetts and other states; recidivism and juvenile crime rates have remained low in these states.

Evaluation methodology for assessing youth-oriented crime prevention programs at reasonable cost remains in its infancy. While some evaluated programs have shown little or no impact on criminal behaviour, evaluation is beginning to understand what works and what does not. Further investments in research and evaluation of crime prevention are clearly justified.

Several popular strategies — including most school-based conflict resolution, peer mediation, and gang prevention efforts — have not yet been rigorously evaluated. Hundreds of these programs are being tested throughout the country, and several show great promise.

### What doesn't work

Other prevention approaches have proved ineffective in repeated tests. Shock incarceration (i.e., boot camps) does not reduce criminality, studies show. Short-term, "quick fix" job training has not lowered arrest rates. Neither traditional psychotherapy nor behaviour modification has shown great promise as a vehicle for redirecting delinquent and criminal youth.

A few efforts — mostly scare-oriented programs or programs that place groups of delinquent youth together for extended treatment — have actually worsened the behaviour of participants.

**"The most impressive interventions focus on the families of troubled youth — even youth with serious behaviour problems."**

Government needs to develop and implement prevention programs aggressively, taking care to learn from experience. Research and evaluation must be important elements in all prevention efforts.

A cost-effective approach to crime requires more than punishment. A country cannot jail away its crime problem by warehousing criminals, young or old. It cannot solve crime solely through deterrence, or by "shocking" trouble-prone youth or "scaring them straight." Rather, to help children and youth grow into productive, constructive adults, they must be supervised, supported, educated, encouraged, cared for and given opportunities to contribute. And they must have positive opportunities for recreation, exploration, and personal growth.

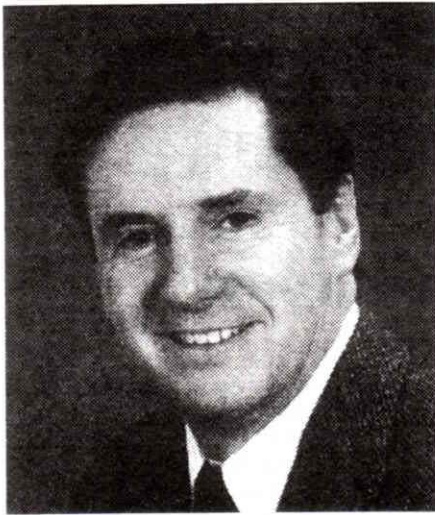
For some youth, particularly those from high-risk families and communities, cognitive skills training and family counselling will also be required. And to be effective, these treatments must be carefully crafted, research-based, and effectively implemented.

To date, nowhere in America have all of these pieces been pulled together in one community, although a number of places are trying to do so. Nowhere has the impact of well-defined, youth-oriented crime prevention programs been fully realized. Prevention's potential remains untapped.

Given the high costs and dubious benefits to be expected from continuing on the *lock-'em-up* path, and given the encouraging results of many youth oriented prevention and intervention strategies, a significant public investment is surely warranted both to strengthen and expand a youth oriented prevention agenda and to step up the effort to refine and improve on prevention's promise.

Throwing money at prevention will not solve our crime problem. But ignoring prevention is an even worse alternative. Both to protect ourselves and to secure our children's future, prevention must become a mainstay in our nation's crime control strategy. A two-armed approach to crime is long overdue.

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## Larry Brendtro to visit in New Year

Internationally known child care writer, teacher and practitioner, Larry Brendtro, will be visiting this country early next year to do training. Many of us remember his visit in 1992. On this occasion he will be travelling with his wife Janna. Dr Brendtro was head of Starr Commonwealth from 1967 to 1981, and today is on the staff of Augustana College, Sioux Falls in South Dakota and one of the hosts of the Black Hills Seminars. All child care students in South Africa will know Larry Brendtro as the co-author of *The Other 23 Hours* and *Reclaiming Children and Youth*, among other publications, including works on positive peer culture and psychoeducational approaches in child and youth care programmes. With Nicholas Long, Larry is also co-editor of *Reclaiming Children and Youth: The Journal of Emotional and Behavioural Problems*. The timetable for his visit will be made known to all NACCW regions shortly.

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- \* preferably have no dependants





Christiann Dean sums up recent thinking on work with families

# Strengthening Families: From 'deficit' to 'empowerment'

Traditional methods of providing services in which "experts" (workers) "deliver services" to those "clients" (or worse, "cases") who can prove their eligibility—do not work very well. Clients, who usually know precisely what their families need, often perceive the worker as a villain who withholds needed resources or tries to shoehorn them into available services. Yet workers' hands are tied by agency policies and protocols. Even if clients are successful in securing one needed service, they still must typically go to several more agencies, often in different buildings and with separate requirements, to negotiate the total range of services needed.

Increasingly, agency workers, policy makers, and families have begun calling for a profound shift away from the fragmented, disempowering manner in which most of our family-serving agencies operate. Many attempts have been made to overhaul this approach, and there have been some heartwarming successes, particularly in local programs. But without significant policy changes at national and provincial levels, individual workers' efforts to work with families in new ways are severely restricted.

## Empowerment: A major paradigm shift

In 1981, I and some of my co-workers in Cornell University's public service outreach arm began to explore an "empowerment" approach to working with families and communities. Eventually we gained the collaboration of hundreds of human-services workers. The empowerment orientation represented a major shift in the "assistance" paradigm: from *doing to* to *doing with*, from *power over* to *power with*, and from *teaching the client* to *collaborative learning*. Since the term "empowerment" is used by many people with varying meanings, here is what we mean by the term: **Empowerment is an intentional, dynamic, ongoing process centered in the local community and**

## Shifts in Beliefs and Attitudes

### IN CLIENTS

#### From:

Feeling hopeless  
Self-doubt  
Self-blame  
"They owe me"; blaming others

#### To:

Feeling hopeful  
Belief in self  
Promoting the possible  
I am responsible for future;  
I control my own life

### IN WORKERS

#### From:

Seeing deficits  
People basically bad  
Expect little of programme participants  
The disadvantaged have different aspirations than the more advantaged  
Professionals know better than the parents or other lay people  
Reliance on "experts"

#### To:

Seeing strengths  
People basically good  
Expect much of program participants  
Aspirations are similar; access to resources differs  
People have different kinds of knowledge  
Reliance on the "commonwealth" in communities  
Consumer norms and goals  
Consumers choose for themselves  
Power with and among  
My views are different

### IN PROGRAMMES

#### From:

Personal/individual thinking  
Competition  
Short-term thinking  
Emphasis on crisis intervention

#### To:

Structural/group/collective thinking  
Co-operation  
Long-term thinking  
Emphasis on crisis prevention

**involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring, and group participation, through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to and control over those resources.** (Cornell, 1989)

The empowerment approach to working with families contrasts sharply with the predominant way of providing human services, which we call the "deficit" orientation. In the deficit orientation, the focus is on what is wrong with families, and the assumption is that they are incapable of identifying their own needs or acting wisely on behalf of themselves and other family members. The deficit perspective continues to be very pervasive at every level of our country's hu-

man service systems, and it seldom succeeds in helping families move toward independence. Our emphasis is on the strengths and potentialities family members bring to the situation and on processes that build on those strengths. A crucial aspect of empowerment is the central role that "disadvantaged" families play in their own change process. Self-determination is crucial to reaching self-sufficiency and breaking the cycle of agency dependency. But self-sufficiency cannot develop without important changes in both agencies and in the people they are set up to serve. My colleague Mon Cochran has, with the help of readers of the *Empowerment and Family Sup-*



ports *Networking Bulletin* and others, identified definite shifts in beliefs and attitudes as systems focus on empowerment: These shifts are shown in the table opposite.

Such a profound change is disconcerting, if not terrifying, to most agency workers, who are accustomed to being in control of resources and directing (however benevolently) the course of the lives of the people "helped". Such a profound shift in the ways our family-serving institutions work will not occur overnight, and some critics scoff at the possibility that it will ever happen. Yet we already are in the midst of such a shift.

In *Family Development: Empowering Families to Move Out of Poverty* (a recent publication of the National Association of Community Action Agencies), Arlene McAtee describes this shift:

[The] old human services paradigm, which measures impact in terms of units of service, requires staff to think in terms of those persons they serve in terms of needing those particular units of service and thus limits their view of the family to those needs they can fulfill. It is service driven and positions staff people as the experts on what a family needs and what a family may receive to meet those needs...

We can no longer settle for delivering some unit of service. We must have highly competent staff whose role is the building of skill and knowledge in families. Skill and knowledge cannot increase unless the staff person has mastered the craft of creating relationships of equals where disclosure, exploration, and learning can flourish. The staff person must firmly believe that they are partners with the family and it is through this partnership that they and the family will discover possibilities and bring dreams to realization....The staff person must not need to be in control or in the lead or in power. (McAtee, n.d.)

In 1992 the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services announced the availability of millions of dollars for "comprehensive co-ordinated" family support services. Congress has appropriated nearly five million dollars for family resource and support programs, and three states were selected in 1993 to pilot such programs.

Several private foundations are moving their funding priorities in similar directions, calling for comprehensive, co-ordinated approaches that build on families' own strengths and incorporate significant policy changes at federal, state, and local levels. In addition, several states are moving their human-service systems in the direction of empowerment, recognizing that without significant policy redirection and leadership at the state level, local pro-

grams cannot make significant changes in the ways they work with families.

In the past several years, New York State has built a comprehensive, systematic structure for moving family-serving agencies toward an empowerment orientation. In order to prepare agency workers to function successfully within this new paradigm, New York State's Community Action Program, the state's Inter-agency Work Group on Family Support and Empowerment, and Cornell University are working together to develop an interagency Family Development Associate staff training and credential system focusing on empowerment and family support skills (New York State Council, 1993).

### New skills

Changes in the way that family support agencies function require new skills for agency workers. The following list has been expanded from one described by Parr and Cochran (1992). It needs refinement, and it will evolve considerably as we gain more experience with new ways of working with families. But it does provide a good place to start as one prepares to empower families:

- Listening and critical-reflection skills.
- Ability to identify and foster strengths in individuals and groups.
- Ability to understand race, gender, and class-related issues and to analyze one's own needs and bias in these areas.
- Group process skills.
- Family-systems theory.
- Developing and maintaining relationships with families.
- Collaborative assessment with families.
- Beyond "case management."
- Referral skills.
- Confidentiality
- Dealing with violence and other unhealthy behaviours.
- Conflict resolution skills.
- Inter-agency collaboration.
- Personal organization: stress management, time management, balancing work and family responsibilities.
- Assertiveness.
- Maintaining a balanced attitude in the face of continual pain and crisis.
- Empowerment in family support workers' own professional and personal lives.
- Constituency-building skills.
- Presentation skills (how to describe empowerment-based programs to audiences accustomed to deficit model).
- Shared decision-making skills.
- Leadership development skills.
- Organizational analysis skills.
- Collaboration skills (handling turf issues, etc.).
- Team- and community-building skills.
- Program planning and grantsman-



**By building on the strengths of families, we empower them to solve their own problems and attain self-sufficiency.**

ship from empowerment perspective.

- Mediation skills.
- Skills in constructive confrontation.
- Investigative research skills.
- Participatory research and evaluation skills.

While many of these skills previously have been addressed by others, the scarcity of training in these skills *from an empowerment perspective* has become evident.

What is needed is a transformation in the way services are delivered to families. This new paradigm will replace fragmented, deficit-oriented crisis intervention with comprehensive family development efforts. By building on the strengths of families, we empower them to solve their own problems and attain self-sufficiency.

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Two features on children in Africa from agencies of **Save the Children** 

# Even Living on a Garbage Dump is a Privilege

'Koshe' is the big garbage dumping site of Addis Ababa city. It covers an estimated ten hectares of land. "Koshe" boys live on what they find in the garbage. The atmosphere of the area is dominated by smoke and bad smells. A minimum of 60 children and adolescents, hundreds of vultures, dogs, donkeys, sheep, and rats are all sniffing and scavenging at this place. The noise of the people, of the animals and of the different flies give a buzzing sound. The children look all alike with soot and ash spread all over their faces, hands and legs. Their clothes are dirty, with patches and holes, and are smeared with something oily and sticky attracting hundreds of flies.

From out of this garbage came an eleven year old boy called Beyedg, walking clumsily. Like all other children of the Koshe, his face is darkened with soot and ash, his mouth and hands greased, his trousers smeared by an assortment of dirty things. He has added shorts on top of the trouser and wears an oversized shirt. He has a bandage to cover the wound on his forehead.

Beyedg is a third grade student in Abune Baslious school which is about 300 meters away from the dumping area. He is enrolled in the afternoon shift which starts at noon and lasts until 5:00 p.m. Every morning from 6:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. he comes to the garbage dumping site and tries to find something useful to him.

Both his parents are affected by leprosy and they live by begging to support their family of ten — an eleven month baby boy, a four year old girl, a thirteen year old boy who is a fourth grade student, a fifteen year old girl who is a sixth grade student, a seven year old sister who

has completed her fifth grade but, at present, a daily labourer, a girl of nineteen who is serving as a maid-servant in the vicinity and a nephew who is twenty, a daily labourer.

Beyedg lives with his family in the old Gebre Kiristos church compound. They live in a cemetery plot which is 3m x 5m. The wall of the cemetery, which is made of mud, has started falling apart and sunshine penetrates the home through the several holes on the roof. There is no kitchen or toilet for the family.

## Beyedg's daily life

"Every morning, I come to the 'Koshe' in search of firewood, food and other items such as plastic bags, bottles, that could be sold. There are times when I find a number of penicillin bottles which could be sold for 0.05/two bottles, 0.25/two bottles (the smaller ones) dextrose bag for 0.10/4 bags. On a few lucky days I get 1.00 - 1.50 Birr a day. With the money, I usually buy food for my siblings who are waiting at home, and sometimes exercise books and pens. The big boys at the Koshe are so much feared and respected, they always want to have the best of the Koshe and leave the minor items for "us" the youngsters. They have several times snatched what I found. They even take the small penicillin bottles which are more valuable than the big bottles from me, so I have to leave what is big for them or try to hide it. Otherwise, they will hit me and take away what they want.

The horrible smell in the Koshe sometimes becomes intolerable with the presence of dead animals which smell very bad.

When I try to minimise the smell by covering my mouth and nose with a small piece of cloth, the objection comes from the others in the form of slaps on my face, arguing that if it smells bad, why should you come here? Most of the time I cough and feel dizzy.

Sometimes I see dead creatures which I have never seen in my life and do not know what they are at all; they are deadly scaring. There are dogs, vultures and big rats which are taking the share of the left-overs. I have to compete with them too.

I have spent over two years around the Koshe. At first, it took me a long time to adjust to the Koshe world. But later on, I started serving as a messenger to the bigger ones by carrying their findings of the Koshe to their homes or hiding places; and that was how I managed to be accepted.

The garbage dumping trucks which come from the Hilton Hotel and Ethiopian Airlines are the best. They bring the best of left over food, and they come early for breakfast. I identify them by their drivers or their plate numbers. The big boys can run and climb up the truck before it reaches the dumping site, pick-up the best of it before it is disposed of. They do not allow us to jump on the truck like them; we have to wait at the dumping site. I have never tried climbing on the truck which is rolling. I am always afraid of falling down from the truck, because I have seen boys falling down and bleeding a lot.

After enduring all this, sometimes, I manage to go back home with some of the left over for my family. I feed myself first and take the rest of it to my siblings who have nothing to eat for the whole day until my parents are back from begging late in the afternoon. They also do not come always with something everyday. I go back home at 11:00 a.m. to get washed and change my dirty clothes and prepare for school. I do not want to be seen so dirty by my classmates, who do not go to the "Koshe". The teacher will also punish me if I am not neat. After class, I am always at home doing my homework, studying or playing. The next day starts again, and the same cycle of life continues. ■







# International Community Must Deal Burundi

In the aftermath of the Organisation Of African Unity (OAU) summit on Burundi, Save the Children today warned, that the international community's continued indecisiveness over the Burundi crisis could further destabilise the country. The charity called on the international community to end speculation over Burundi, by issuing a clear statement outlining the measures it proposes to take to help resolve the country's problems. As many as 1,000 people a week have been killed in this crisis in the last three years. With over half of Burundi's population aged 15 and under, an entire generation of children face an uncertain future, possibly as displaced within Burundi or as refugees in the neighbouring countries. The increasing instability and insecurity has resulted in thousands of children and their families being displaced

asing attention is being focused on gangs in South Africa's violence-ridden society. In an to reclaim their streets and their lives, communities are working together with the police to common solutions to the gangs' stranglehold — while the government is under increasing to take a hard line on juvenile crime. In this article, **Don Pinnock** argues that youth gangs serve an important function in urban society. They provide a "rite of passage" from childhood hood in the absence of formalised rituals. Instead of bemoaning the evils of gangs, we need to at's good about them and use the answers to build a better social support and justice system.

# Gangs, Guns and Rites of Passage

Following quote from anthropologist Joseph Campbell neatly sums up what I want to say about gangs and Youth violence. "Everywhere have a need for marking their passage to adulthood. If society does not provide it they will inevitably invent their own." He begins with a provocative statement: "Youth gangs work. If you don't, young people will do something else."

... if they are used for strong-arming people, smuggling drugs, and back them with immediate action." He added: "We need to acknowledge the reality of the situation in Burundi today. With a new government in place, the issue is not about recognition, but about discovering whether this government is committed to securing

Father Jim Consedyne, who recently visited South Africa from New Zealand, noted that the law imposed by the English wherever they colonised was the law of a conquering empire. They did to others what the Roman Empire had attempted with them — impose its own form of imperial law. In essence it was hierarchical and centralised. In criminal matters it

### "... young people are engaged in rites of

... passage. If this fails, then any security assistance if decided upon must have clear terms of reference understandable to all parties concerned. It was partly the delay in describing the Terms of Reference which brought about the collapse of the Ntibantunganya government." Save the Children believes

many highly politicised young people, but many more who were simply brutalised by ghetto conditions and state neglect at all levels.

Any magistrate, prosecutor or lawyer will acknowledge that crimes of violence happen when the underpinnings of our culture fail, when the ties that hold us together, socialise our children and satisfy our needs, are broken. American sociologist Sarah van Gelder has noted that: "the result of this unprotection and

... security must be restored to the population and for the work of those agencies trying to assist it. With nearly one million refugees in the neighbouring countries of Zaire and Tanzania, any increased instability, and possible war in Burundi is likely to have a destabilising impact in the region.

## Save the Children INFORMATION

### Food

Over the past year Save the Children has seconded a food security expert to the World Food Programme to assess the food and other needs of the country's displaced and vulnerable population. Save the Children currently has personnel in Ngozi in the north of Burundi assessing the needs of children in the area. The charity is now on standby to intervene in the areas of child welfare, in particular working with unaccompanied children, health and rural development.

### Refugees

Save the Children has been working with authorities in Tanzania, and other

agencies to assess the implications of a further influx of people into the area which is already home to 700,000 refugees. The Tanzanian border is the largest border crossing in the region, in the past crisis this is where people have fled to. Save the Children teams are already on standby, contingency plans have been drawn up to ensure that needs can be met if the situation were to arise.

### Unaccompanied children

In Rwanda, Save the Children has teams at the transit site in Butare in the south and at Gashora (which is just south of the capital Kigali) identifying and registering unaccompanied children as they come across the border with a view to reuniting them as fast as possible with their natural families, and to ensure that those who arrive with foster families remain together as a family unit. In the event of children be-

ing genuinely unaccompanied, measures are in place to ensure that they receive appropriate temporary care whilst their families are being traced. Save the Children also has teams on standby ready to be deployed at all major border crossings.

### Emergency needs

Save the Children has stocks of reunification kits consisting of items such as blankets, buckets and plastic sheeting for shelter in Rwanda which could be re-deployed in an emergency to meet the needs of any new displaced or refugee population.

Visit the Internet site of Save the Children at <http://www.devcap.org/stc/>



# International Community Must Decide On Burundi

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from their homes and cut off from urgent humanitarian assistance, as well as the opportunity to a normal life.

## Children in the balance

Mark Bowden, Save the Children's east Africa area director said today:

"While the international community continues to adopt a wait and see approach to this crisis, the fate of Burundi's children now hangs in the balance. The truth is there is very little time left. The international community must get to grips with this situation; come up with firm proposals, and back them with immediate action."

He added: "We need to acknowledge the reality of the situation in Burundi today. With a new government in place, the issue is not about recognition, but about discovering whether this government is committed to securing



Hutu children at a refugee camp near Bujumbura pray for peace

a political solution to this crisis. All avenues of diplomatic activity, and dialogue including the Arusha negotiations must be explored as a preferable alternative at this stage, to the offer of outside security assistance. Economic embargoes are not helpful given Burundi's vulnerability. If this fails, then any security assistance if decided upon must have clear terms of reference understandable to all parties concerned. It was partly the delay in describing the Terms of Reference which brought about the collapse of the Ntibantunganya government." Save the Children believes

that the imperative are to halt the killings and to avoid further massive movements of population. International aid in Burundi should now be directed at providing basic services at commune level to discourage large scale flight across borders. Protection and security must be restored to the population and for the work of those agencies trying to assist it. With nearly one million refugees in the neighbouring countries of Zaire and Tanzania, any increased instability, and possible war in Burundi is likely to have a destabilising impact in the region.

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The University of the Western Cape's **Julia Sloth-Nielson** reports on a workshop held in Cape Town this month

## Towards Redrafting the Child Care Act

Amendments to the Child Care Act, No 74 of 1983, have been in the pipeline for some years now, and the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Welfare and Population Development has over the past year debated several draft versions of proposed amending legislation.

But because the envisaged amendments have turned out to be extremely limited in scope, and because of reported widespread dissatisfaction with the 1983 Act, the decision was taken to spearhead a process of complete revision of our Child Care legislation.

### Briefing workshop

To give impetus to and concrete suggestions on the nature of the redrafting, the portfolio committee, under the chairpersonship of Mr Cas Saloojee, MP, and the University of the Western Cape Community Law Centre's Children's Rights Project held a workshop recently to brief parliamentarians on key issues affecting reform in the child law arena.

The workshop was opened by Ian Macleod of UNICEF, who pledged UNICEF support for the process of revision of the country's child protection laws in the context of ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. A ma-

ajor input concerned the scope of proposed legislation, and whether a comprehensive approach would be at all feasible. Recently, for example, the amendments to the 1983 Act to regulate child labour were dropped from the amendment bill, because responsibility for this issue has been handed from the dept of Welfare to the dept of Labour. This type of piecemeal approach makes comprehensive child laws more difficult to achieve, yet after consideration of the intersectoral approach of the South African Law Commission, and the legislative developments that are already underway under the auspices of this body, the workshop felt that the goal to strive for would in fact be a law that is as complete as possible, with the widest possible reach.

### Input from Africa

A significant contribution to the proceedings was the experiences of other African countries who have recently embarked on the process of law reform in their countries. Dr Eric Kibuka told of the development of the 1996 Uganda Children Act, and of the methods used by their law reformists to engage the public in the process of drafting what has become an acknowledged benchmark for child sensitive and culturally appropriate legislation. Janet Kabeberi-Macharia of the faculty of Law at the University of Nairobi, described the religious and cultural diversity that was at issue in the drafting of the Kenya Draft Bill on Children (1996).

Finally, Batseba Katjuonga from that country's Department of Health and Social Services explained the Namibian initiative in this regard, which was particularly apposite since Namibia had inherited South Africa's Act.

The workshop was characterised by detailed and expert discussion on key aspects underpinning present child law: the role of the children's court, the future of institutions, and alternative forms of custody and guardianship, to name but three. Many speakers exposed the necessity of sensitivity to constitutional rights, to substantive equality for women, and to the need for recognition of cultural and religious interests.

In the final analysis, the portfolio committee formulated detailed recommendations, which have been recorded as a basis for action. The intention is to redraft a new law by the end of 1997, one that will stand South Africa's children proud in the new democratic era.

The Children's Rights Project will publish edited proceedings of the conference; the book will be available on order from the Community Law Centre, University of the Western Cape, from January 1997.

**The National Association of Child Care Workers. Why not become a member? Participate in the discussion. Have access to your own copy of this journal and other literature. Enjoy a 25% discount on all NACCW courses and conferences.**

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knew: adulthood does not gain full expression by itself — initiation and ritual guidance are required.

In more traditional societies, when girls reach menses, they are secluded and taught the art of womanhood by older females in their community. Boys typically face an ordeal which earns and affirms their passage to manhood, whether it is a first hunt and ritual warfare or psychic ordeal, initiation into clubs and organisations, scarification and apprenticeship to a spiritual master. Each consciously recognises that adolescence involves a process, a becoming, a transformation. It is a time filled both with danger and enormous potential for growth. But, wherever adolescents are, their need to test their mettle, to become heroes and to be accepted is paramount.

Elaborate rituals have developed around the heroic deed. While hunting is no longer a vital skill in most of the world, many people in traditional societies still consider the first hunt to be a necessary milestone on the road to adulthood. Among the !Kung, for example, a boy traditionally cannot marry until he has made a kill.

Risking one's life is inevitable in these hunts, but the necessary challenge can also be found elsewhere. In Vanuatu, to prove their courage adolescents dive from high towers with elastic vines, just short enough to prevent them crashing to their deaths, attached to their ankles.

Other rites of passage are more spiritual. After Jewish barmitzvah at thirteen a boy becomes a Son of the Commandment and accountable for his actions. He can now be counted in the quorum for public prayer and publicly bless and read the Torah and the prophetic Haftorah.

I recently spent two weeks with peasant people in the Transkei studying how they dealt with adolescents. What was interesting was how young people in that culture are "held" in the passage of transformation. Their need for acts of bravery, sexual encounters, times of abandon and times of strict ritual learning were acknowledged and built into the fabric of the society.

At all points they were acknowledged, made to feel important, set goals and tests for social acceptance. When things went wrong, decisions were made in what I can only call healing circles — inkundlas — which did not so much deal out punishment but reach decisions which restored family and community harmony. It is not a system without problems, but it's certainly something we in the cities have lost.

In our urban metropolises and cultures, ritual has been submerged in the struggle for survival and young people devise their own rites of passage.

In Rio de Janeiro teenage "surfistas" ride atop trains speeding through the hills above the city, risking serious injury or death. In Cape Town young gang members "break a bottle-neck". In some gangs ritual might involve a gang rape or a killing.

But whatever form they take, rites of passage are those crucial moments when we pass from one state of being to the next. And we do this by taking collected wisdom

of an entire culture or a single street and presenting this knowledge in the form of effecting and comprehensible dramas. This need is neatly captured by sociologist Thurmon Amold:

*"Every individual, for reasons lying deep in the mystery of personality, constructs for himself a succession of little dramas in which he is the principal character. No one escapes the constant necessity of dressing himself in a series of different uniforms or silk hats, and watching himself go by."*

Gangs are a contradictory and "imagined" community created to distance young people from the influence of parents or to make up for their absence; a bond of friendship, fear, protection or enmity; a badge of honour and a mark of the beast; a way of making money or ensuring a supply of drugs. Above all, they attract attention.

Their members are young men (and less often young women) who have newly reached the age of sexual "maturity" (as it is rather optimistically called) but who live in a culture which does not provide ritual pathways for becoming sexually mature. So they become simply active.

When their situation is complicated by poverty, racism, broken homes or drugs, it can seem a trackless waste. In hard stony ground, rituals take on a life-or-death quality. Ritual occasions are fraught with perils because the aggressive impulses of human beings are accompanied by very few restraints.

On the volatile streets of the ghettos there is an ever-present danger that aggressions usually held in check by social pressure may break free. The search for "respect" in the crossing to adulthood takes on larger-than-life proportions.

In this atmosphere police attention, arrest, lashes or prison become the dangers of the hunt, the dizzying dive to the end of the rope, a rite of passage through the hallways and rooms of the enemy into the bosom of the admiring gang.

In the desperation of the streets, peer admiration has a high value and the trickle-down from successful crime syndicates keeps the door from the wolf of poverty.

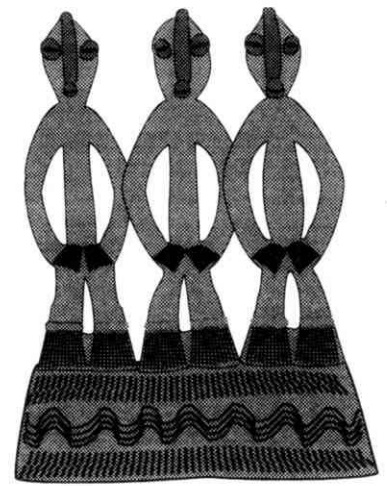
And the explosive impact of bearing down retributively on young people undergoing a rite of passage is likely to produce consequences that could keep the army in the ghettos into the 21st century. Violence breeds violence.

The bottom line is that we are a creature that kills, and we have ritualised killing. For this there is no ulterior reason at all. In times of transition between a violent and a less violent society, between adolescence and adulthood, in the absence of well-structured rites of passage supervised by respected elders, the Lords of the Flies prevail.

#### **A new approach**

Another approach is needed, which lowers confrontation, raises the self-evaluation of gang members and reinstates the importance of elders able to guide the rites of passage into safer waters.

We need to do the hardest thing possible in



**We need to do the hardest thing possible in the present emotionally-charged climate: to ask what's good about gangs and use the answers to build a better social support and justice system.**

the present emotionally-charged climate: to ask what's good about gangs and use the answers to build a better social support and justice system.

Jim Considine suggests that civilisation only begins when vendetta ends and "the public cry for retribution shows that we are still close to barbarism". Certainly, if crime and prison rates are anything to go by, retributive justice systems are open to question and underscore the need for more effective approaches.

For a start, official and societal disregard for the role older people in the community play in social control and management, and the destruction of the 'veranda culture' of the old inner-city areas in mass removals, are some reasons why many young people in the ghettos are now even beyond the control of the forces of law and order.

If restorative justice and human rights are to mean anything they must first restore the centrality and dignity of older people, especially teachers of skills and knowledge essential for rites of passage. Approaches and programmes must be created that mean something to young people at risk.

We must enter the world of adolescents in a dynamic way, mindful of the dangers but unafraid of ideas and programmes that may seem heretical.

We need, at root, to restore lost rites and rituals of adolescence or invent new ones where none exist.

This is not going soft on gangs: nobody who went through a genuine social ritual ever considered it easy.

We need to scrap the concept of gangs and instead ask questions related to levels of violence, the distinction between syndicates, precinct racketeers and foot soldiers, about levels of safety — or unsafety — which force kids to defend themselves against their peers.

Reprinted from *Track Two*



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# The Sense of a Goose

(A reflection of working together)

**In spring when you see geese heading north for the summer, flying in a V-formation, you may be interested to know what scientists have discovered about why they fly that way.**

It has been learnt that as each bird flaps its wings, it creates an uplift for the bird immediately following. By flying in a V-formation, the whole flock adds at least 71% greater flying ability than if each bird flew on its own.

**BASIC TRUTH 1: People who share a common direction and a sense of communication get where they are going more quickly and more easily because they are travelling on the trust of one another.**

When a goose falls out of formation it suddenly feels the drag and resistance of trying to go it alone and quickly gets back into formation to take advantage of the lifting power of the birds immediately in front.

**BASIC TRUTH 2: If we have even as much sense as a goose we will stay in formation with those who are headed in the same way that we are going.**

When the lead goose gets tired, that goose rotates to the back and another goose takes up the lead.

**BASIC TRUTH 3: It pays to take turns doing difficult tasks.**

The geese honk from behind to encourage those up front to keep their speed, or reduce it.

**BASIC TRUTH 4: We need to be careful what we say when we honk from behind.**

Finally when a goose gets sick, or is wounded by gunshot or falls out, two geese immediately fall out from the formation and fly down to help and protect the one in trouble. They stay with the goose until it is able to fly again, or dies.

**BASIC TRUTH 5: If we have the sense of a goose we will stand by one other.**



Readers send in questions about practice issues they struggle with ....

# Giving up on kids



**I have been badly let down by one of our adolescent girls — and after all I have done for her. I feel like withdrawing my affection and support from her.**

It is clear that you are feeling hurt and disappointed about someone with whom you have been making some effort. It is natural for us to be disappointed when our plans and commitments don't seem to bear fruit — and indeed when they seem to have been wasted.

But we often have to be reminded that the children and youth we work with are in care because of long-term, serious difficulties, and that success is never guaranteed or easy to come by. We will spend long hours trying to teach better behaviours, and just when we think the kid has 'got it' she does something to show us that we have a long way to go.

But if we withdraw our affection and support from a youngster whom we feel has let us down, we will probably just confirm for her the experience of being rejected for her failures — and for disappointing adults.

### **Shared responsibilities**

Progress and success with this girl should not be your responsibility alone. Together, your management and staff colleagues should have accepted this responsibility, and this means two things —

(a) Together, your staff team should be planning interventions and committing resources and energy;

(b) Together, your team should be bearing the disappointment (and, if necessary, agonising) over the lack of progress. Your supports and rewards, therefore, should be coming from your team colleagues and from the satisfaction of having done what you set out to do — not from the loyalty and performance of one of the children.

This team support ensures that the direction of the flow of care is from the adults to the children — not the other way around.

In the normal commerce of family relationships, the children rarely pay the adults back for their contributions in time and energy; they repay by making their own commitment to the families they will create, to their partners and their children.

### **A danger**

There is a serious danger that you may convey a sense of your own emotional dependence on this young person, which will unnecessarily raise her anxiety and guilt over not meeting your expectations.

In adolescence, especially, we are moving our young clients towards acceptance of responsibility for their own behaviour.

What we should be concerned about with this particular young girl is that she will be able to function satisfactorily within her own world. Right now she needs you to stick with her, focussing on what *she* needs to learn and master, not confusing this with what *you* may need from her.

When we find ourselves having to play adult/parental roles with children, alongside our teaching and guiding roles, it is easy for us to get hooked into our needs for personal satisfaction from "our" children. But in the words of Kahlil Gibran, "your children are not your children ..."

### **Professional attitude**

In our giving and involvement with these hurt and troubled children, we can lose the *balance* we should maintain between our personal closeness and professional distance.

A teacher may be disappointed when a pupil fails a test or doesn't learn a difficult subject, but this demands further effort on her part — not the withdrawal of affection and support.

So with us as child and youth care workers. Things are always coming out other than the way we planned: our job is not to get strung out over that, or to take it personally, but to get back to the drawing board. Nobody is letting us down; we just have to try something different, and try harder! Someone once remarked that the quality of a good child care programme was not measured by the behaviour of the children towards the adults — but by the behaviour of the adults towards the children.

### **Parental generosity**

Adolescents do not need us to lay any additional stress on them just as they are setting out on their own adventure to independence.

Haim Ginott expressed very tellingly this conflict which we adults feel, adding a challenge to child care workers:

"Our need is to be needed. Their need is not to need us. To let go when we want to hold on requires the utmost generosity and love. Only parents are capable of such painful greatness." — *BG*



# He/she who laughs ... LASTS!

ROBERT CHUBB

What is a frivolous subject like humour doing in a professional journal like this? After all, we are professionals. Our work is important and has serious implications for children and families. Let's get serious!

In our personal relationships, the positive power of humour is intuitive. We use it often, we use it naturally, and we take it for granted. Humour serves us well in this capacity.

As professionals, however, we cannot take our interactions for granted. We must be aware and intentional in our relationships with children. Our helping relationships call for purposeful interactions toward desired outcomes. Humour seems to defy these criteria. How does a topic as casual and commonplace as humour warrant legitimate professional consideration? Fortunately, being a serious professional does not mean being a solemn professional. The following close examination of the functions of humour and laughter in children's lives reveals its many advantages. Humour is legitimised. These benefits provide a basis for humour, and strongly suggest that we promote the development of children's use of humour during our therapeutic interactions with them. While the rationale for incorporating humour in our work and play with children is provided, the method is not. You are a child and youth care worker. You already have a sense of humour. Use the farce. Creatively reinforce children's appropriate humour and model alternatives. Mark Twain cautioned against analysing humour. He likened the exercise to that of dissecting a frog. He said, "You learn a lot about it, but you end up with a dead frog." In the interest of geleotology, "the science of laughter," and the child and youth care profession, let's hop to it.

A sense of humour is a positive and dynamic life skill that helps children at risk function more effectively in their daily lives. As an emotional self-management

skill, humour helps children defend against their own negative emotional impulses by reducing anxiety, body tension, and aggression. Humour maintains emotional equilibrium by buffering stress, nurturing self-esteem, enhancing perspective and managing personal crises. As a social skill, humour facilitates children's one-to-one relationships by demonstrating friendliness and empathy. Children's group experiences are enhanced through cohesion and acceptance.

## HUMOUR AS BEHAVIOURAL SELF-MANAGEMENT

### Reduces Emotional Anxiety

Humour's ability to alleviate emotional anxiety provides children with an emergency defence against negative impulses. Children who effectively use humour and laughter to lower their anxiety level can give themselves time to establish inner control and inhibit behavioural outbursts. This strategy can effectively interrupt self-defeating impulsive behaviours and associated tantrums. The children we work with often worry about their own emotional physical safety. Anxiety relating to self and to unknown environments is effectively reduced by laughter (Coser, 1959). We know all too well that children in our care must cope with unpredictable changes in their living environments. Robinson (1977) states, "Anxiety is one of the most common sources of discomfort that prompts the use of humour" (p. 116). Apparently humour's success in alleviating anxiety is naturally reinforcing, hence its frequent use.

### Reduces Body Tension

Laughter can help the child's body relax. During hearty laughter, the release of endorphins from the brain into the body has an anaesthetic-like effect that relaxes the muscles (Cousins, 1979). Described by Cousins as "internal jogging," laughter's arousal of the musculo-skeletal



**Child and youth care workers are encouraged to lighten up and get serious about humour.**

system not only relaxes the body, but it is followed by a state of relaxation in which muscle tension falls below the norm. The advantage of this self-induced relaxing experience to emotionally charged children is evident. Based on his research, William Fry Jr. (cited in Robinson, 1977, p. 166) stated, "This diminished muscle tone reduces the ability of the body to act aggressively."

### Reduces Aggression

Humour and laughter interrupt hostile emotions and aggressive behaviours. As Cornett (1986) writes, "You cannot be laughing and angry at the same time" (p. 15). Laughter creates opportunity to mobilise other positive emotions (Cousins, 1979). The use of humour to transform aggressive emotions into positive ones can be learned by children as young as nine years of age (Cornett, 1986). Cornett contends that humour dissolves resistance and facilitates the therapeutic process. Aggressive behaviours are subsequently disrupted. The child care worker who cajoles the resistant child and gains co-operation is being therapeutic. Tension that might otherwise be acted out by hitting, punching or kicking is released (Cornett, 1986). Kaplan and Boyd observed that even hostile humour "inhibited deviant behaviour" (cited in Robinson, 1977, p. 116). Lorenz's metaphor is vivid: "laughing men (or women) hardly ever shoot" (cited in Ro-

binson, 1977, p. 116).

## HUMOUR TO MAINTAIN EMOTIONAL EQUILIBRIUM

### Buffers Daily Stressors

Humour is a mature coping device that helps emotionally fragile children maintain emotional equilibrium and effectively buffers daily stressors. In the shifting and threatening milieu, it can reassure and release tension (Coser, 1959). A "good sense of humour" is often associated with maturity (Masten, 1986), and authorities agree that it is a healthy mechanism for dealing with life's difficulties (Fry, 1984).

### Nurtures Self-Esteem

Self-esteem and identity are nurtured through humour. Cultivating an appreciation of humour is an integral aspect of personality development (Jalongo, 1985). The pattern of humour development parallels the child's intellectual and emotional development (Cornett, 1986). Additionally, Fry (1984) concluded that humour furthers the child's sense of identity and self understanding. This is central to our work with children. Studies by Cornett (1986) concur that young children who have low self-esteem can begin to view themselves more positively when they can bring pleasure to others through laughter. Studies of high school students also indicate many positive correlations between humour and positive self-concept (Fabrizi & Pollio, 1987). Freud referred to the liberating effects of humour as "building ego strength" (cited in Haig, 1986, p. 548).

### Enhances Perspectives

Humour involves a forward shift in perspective that, according to Piaget (cited in Ziv, 1984, p. 83), is "a reaction to mastery of a challenge that was formerly not understood." Research has subsequently revealed that laughter stimulates the left and right sides of the brain, resulting in simultaneous processing of abstract and logical aspects of thought, thus having therapeutic value (Robinson, 1977). Studies indicate humour is highly related to insight (Jalongo, 1985). Joel Goodman observes that this insight includes "the element of surprise." This sudden discovery of "ah-ha learning" involving a pleasant emotional shift and accompanying laughter (ha-ha) is aptly referred to by Goodman as "the ha-ha, ah-ha connection" (Crabbs, Crabbs, & Goodman, 1986, p. 106).

### Manages Life Crises

Humour helps children appropriately reduce the impact of crises. By lightening the heaviness related to tragedy and death, overpowering emotions are neutralised (Robinson, 1977). Perhaps these negative emotions are not eliminated as Robinson states, but their impact may be reduced by the retention of hope that humour provides. In crises, "humour retains hope" (Robinson). Robinson states that

anger and anxiety often lead to denial of reality. Conversely Freud states that humour does not "overstep the bounds of mental health" (cited in Robinson, p. 116). Both perspectives support the use of humour as a healthy response during crisis. Child care workers can promote humour as a personal coping strategy. Humour is a personal management skill that children at risk can learn to help them regulate their emotions during life crisis.

## HUMOUR AS A SOCIAL SKILL IN ONE-TO-ONE RELATIONSHIPS

### Demonstrates Friendliness

The function of humour as a social skill that helps children manage interactions with others is evident. Humour, by demonstrating friendliness, helps children initiate relationships. Victor Borge says, "Laughter is the shortest distance between two people" (cited in Crabbs, Crabbs, & Goodman, 1986, p. 107). Ziv (1982) maintains that humour is a key for opening up interpersonal relationships, and Stephenson relates that humour "serves to indicate safety and friendship" (cited in Lindzey & Aronson, 1969, p. 811).

### Demonstrates Empathy

Children with the ability to be humorous can nurture their relationships by displaying empathy, that is, sharing humour with others demonstrates caring (Morreall, 1983). Children who can be empathic with peers have a greater capacity for developing and maintaining relationships; however, child and youth care workers will recognize the difficulties some children have in developing this capacity. Cornett (1986) indicates that children become capable of empathy at around 9 to 10 years of age. At around this age, according to Cornett, children are usually able to shift toward the sympathetic use of humour that considers a joke as funny only when it is not harmful to others. Effective humour allows the person to laugh *with* others, as opposed to laughing *at* others (Crabbs, Crabbs, & Goodman, 1986). It shows acceptance and a desire to please others (Morreall, 1983).

## HUMOUR AS A SOCIAL SKILL IN GROUP CONTEXTS

### Creates Cohesion

Humour creates the opportunity for children to experience closeness in a group. Humour is contagious in nature (Morreall, 1983); in spreading from person to person, it fosters group cohesion (Jalongo, 1985). The result is an experience of social communion and community (McGhee & Goldstein, 1983). Humour helps children get along. As child and youth care workers, we can help create positive group experiences for children who do not relate well. Children who learn these skills can create a positive group experience for themselves over and over again.

## Gains Acceptance

When children use humour they can improve their chances of being socially accepted. Humour helps them gain friends and promotes group membership (Morreall, 1983). It wins social approval, and enhances belonging (Robinson, 1977). Laughter and humour are so widespread in human societies that individuals who abstain from them may be judged abnormal (Lindzey & Aronson, 1969). Children who lack humour are seen by peers as withdrawn, quiet, shy, unhappy, or isolated (Masten, 1986). Humour has been used to integrate social isolates (Morreall, 1983). Children with behavioural disorders are especially vulnerable to exclusion because they often have difficulty understanding group humour (Cornett, 1986).

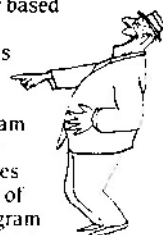
## Conclusions

Clearly, humour provides at-risk children the opportunity to better manage themselves and their relationships. The benefits are multi-dimensional and cumulative. Ziv (1984) reveals the positive power of humour in this statement: "Thus humour can help a child climb the ladder of social hierarchy ... to be accepted, to win affection, and to gain status" (p. 30). Children and youth care workers who currently use humour in relationships with children can feel assured they are professionals imparting a valuable laugh skill. Intuitive applications of humour can now be understood, valued, and used at a conscious level of understanding. Counselors who have practised mirth control because of personal or professional concerns may give themselves permission to lighten up and get serious about humour. Add it to your repertoire of skills. It is a legitimate therapeutic tool-of-the-trade that can help enlighten our children and counterbalance weighty interventions. As the old saying goes, if all you have is a hammer, you tend to perceive every challenge as a nail to be hit. Sometimes you need a monkey wrench. So go ahead, give the lift of laughter!

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**Rob Chubb** lives in Sherwood Park, Alberta with his three natural children, two foster children, and his one wife, Laurie. Rob's background as a child and youth care professional and educator includes residential, group home, and community based programs.

Rob believes that s/he who laughs ... lasts! He is a graduate of Grant MacEwan Community College's Child and Youth Care Program in Edmonton, Alberta where he is currently employed as he continues his education with the University of Victoria's Child & Youth Care Program in Victoria, BC.





# Bad Haircut Memories from Long Ago



We were having a hamburger one Saturday evening at our local McDonald's, when my attention was snagged by a young father-son team who sat down in the booth in front of us. The boy was about 8 or 9, a near-looking little chap wearing horizontally striped, baggy pants.

But after a few minutes it was not those loud pants that continued to intrigue me. It was the boy's haircut, only the back of which I could see. It was crisply short, as precise as though the proverbial bowl had been placed on his head and someone had snipped around it. From mid-skull down, there was no hair: it was clean as a whistle — shaven to a T. I had to admire it. A perfect job.

And then it came to me: What I was staring at was the typical Uncle Adam haircut. A typical Uncle Adam scalping! I'd had a haircut just like that when I was his age. And the ignominy of that red-letter evening more than half a century ago returned in a flash.

Always on a Friday night — Uncle Adam, Aunt Cathy, and family came to visit from the city. Even when the kids were grown and had left home, my mother's sister and her husband continued the custom. The four of them played bridge on our round dining-room table. The visits were always one-sided, because only Uncle Adam had a car. A toolmaker, he held his job during the Depression, but it was touch-and-go nonetheless. So corners were cut, and none of my six cousins got near a barbershop or beauty salon until they earned their own money.

Uncle Adam was adept with his barbering tools. He had a complete kit, always ready for action. He even packed a flashy bib to place around the customer's neck, intended to prevent messy clippings from sticking to clothing. He finished off with a shake of baby powder, dusted on the neck with a soft shaving brush. He was generous and persistent, frequently

eyeing my fringe which grew down over my eyebrows and offering to give me a trim.

His kindness was appreciated, but no, thanks, my mother protested, aware of how I, her independent daughter, felt about his expertise. But one evening the inevitable came to pass. I'd lost the 50 cents entrusted to me that day to go to Armand's for my usual six-week haircut, and she caved in before Uncle Adam's jocular criticism of my "hayseed" coiffure. She mandated me into the old high chair to "take advantage of Adam's kind offer".

With a professional swish of the barbering apron, he went to work on me. My father stood by, not exactly admiring but helpfully pointing out spots that looked uneven as his brother-in-law, in grim-lipped silence, proceeded. Dad's supervision was getting under Uncle Adam's skin, and I was bearing the brunt of it. His hand shook unexplainably, veteran though he was, and my father's unfunny offer of a cereal bowl didn't help matters.

Mother came into the kitchen to size up things. She gave Dad one of her "quit the comedy" looks, and he slunk off. "Excuse me, Adam," she began haltingly, "but isn't it a bit shorter on the left side? I realise she has sort of a weird growth pattern — all those cowlicks — but you might want to stand back and get a good look." So of course he had to clip the right side to even everything out.

Mother sighed: "Well, as long as it's gone this far, maybe a boyish shingle?" she whispered.

As far as I could remember, I'd worn my dirty-blond hair in a plain, no-nonsense Dutch bob. Armand knew the ritual: "Just above the tip of the ears, and a fringe straight across. By the new sensation of coolness I knew that probably half, rather than the bottom of my ears, were exposed. "Let me look!" I pleaded, trying to get out of the chair.

"In a minute," Uncle Adam said, sweat beading on his upper lip. He turned to Mother: "All right, then, a new-fangled shingle it'll be."

When I finally leapt free of that high seat and got to the mirror over the sink, I let out a horrified yelp and bolted out the door.

I didn't stop running till I was five houses up the street at a place where a private road led off to a small grove of maple trees. I flopped beneath one and shrank into its trunk. It was a young tree, and I was young, and it seemed to sympathize with my anguish.

I wept, crouching miserably on the hard ground till dusk, then darkness, closed over me. I shivered with dread at the thought of facing my peers at school. All the while, I could hear the grownups and my cousins calling me. I never stirred, determined to hide out till my hair grew back to normal — or forever, whichever came first.

Eventually, I saw my uncle's crowded Nash go by on the road below, en route to their city home. My father found me in the moonlight. He didn't scold, didn't laugh. "Never you mind," he consoled, helping me up from my cramped position. "It's nothing to leave home about. You'll just be a bit more careful with money from now on. Adam meant well. He's always been your favourite uncle. He was just a tad nervous for some reason. I was only trying to bolster him. So come on home. Things'll look better in the morning."

They did, a little. When I went back to school on Monday morning I was actually sort of a hit — the first girl on the block to sport a boyish shingle. I endured, as did that young maple tree. And as my husband and I emptied our trays into the waste bin at McDonald's, I turned to the young sport busily shovelling chips into a ketchupy mouth.

"Nice hair job, man," I said, smiling as we exited.

Alma Giordan in *The Monitor*



# What exactly is Child and Youth Care Work?

Continuing our  
series in which we  
examine the nature  
of child and youth  
care practice

Richard Small (a successor of Al Trieschman at the Walker Home and School in Boston) and Laura Dodge (1988) undertook a very interesting study to help clarify the definition of a child and youth care worker. They started with a definition developed by the 1981 Conference-Research Sequence in Child Care Education group (VanderVen, Mattingley and Morris, 1982):

- Child Care personnel:** Those adults who either —
- (a) directly care for children in a variety of group settings, including early childhood day care, child development programmes, day treatment programmes, community youth and recreation programmes, group homes, residential treatment centres, schools, hospitals and institutions;
  - (b) work with families in the home or through expanded family networks in foster care or preventive community mental health programmes; or
  - (c) provide support to the child care field, such as administrators, supervisors, educators or researchers.

This consensus definition by the group was achieved despite the fact that they recorded no fewer than 33 different titles for those who do this work!

In clarifying the roles, skills and tasks of child and youth care workers, Small and Dodge decided that before we talk about what they should be doing, we need to have a picture of what they actually are doing. "What, specifically, are the generic tasks undertaken by all child care workers in day-to-day job functioning?" In order to assemble a profile of child care job tasks they analysed more than 150 references in the literature and arrived at six

distinct categories of tasks which make up the work of the child care worker, "the first two of which accounted for by far the most extensive listings of tasks and skills."

### 1. Child care worker as parent substitute or primary caretaker

This categorisation was most dominant in the earlier references. While the role of parent substitute came to be questioned, say Small and Dodge, writers like Eva Burmeister in the 1960 classic *The Professional Houseparent* "also included a more therapeutic orientation, yet she emphasises in much more elegant detail ... the central importance of physical caring to the job of professional child care."

### 2. Skills and tasks of child care as a therapeutic intervention

Three works in the 1950's and 1960's characterised the "therapeutic milieu" tasks in this classification: Bettelheim's *Love is Not Enough*, Redl and Wineman's *The Aggressive Child* and Trieschman, Whittaker and Brendtro's *The Other 23 Hours*. "Each of these three practice models," write Small and Dodge, "stressed the clinical exploitation of life events throughout the environment and, in particular, identified the child care worker as potentially the most important therapeutic agent in the programme." Morris Fritz Mayer described the child care worker as the "universal educator", teaching the child the skills for mastering the demands of everyday living and successful social interaction, in addition to providing physical care and managing daily structures and routines. He identi-

fied a number of specific leadership, recreation and teaching skills necessary for carrying out this expanded professional role.

### 3. Child care worker as a member of the professional team

The emphasis here is on the complex skills required of the child care worker in balancing interpersonal relationships amongst children, staff and administration — and the necessity for care workers to be consistently informed of all progress and difficulties concerning children in their care.

### 4. Training of child care workers

An important reason for identifying child care worker tasks and skills is to devise training courses, and a major contribution to this thinking has come from child care teachers and trainers — which is obviously itself one of the tasks in the field.

### 5. Child care worker as a member of an emerging profession

Highlighted here is the fact that in order to be an effective child care worker, a person must also pay attention to personal and professional development. Just as there are roles and tasks associated with the direct work with children, there are roles and tasks associated with the growing and developing worker.

### 6. New roles and tasks: the child care worker in the family and the community

James Whittaker has over the past fifteen years suggested new child care job functions developing outside the institutional setting, particularly in family intervention. He also sees child care worker roles and tasks in schools, probation work, drop-in youth centres and on the streets. Herb Barnes, among others, made a strong case for the child care worker as the primary practitioner.

"Thus," write Small and Dodge, "the traditional role of the child care worker has, at least theoretically, expanded to include family therapist, admissions worker, after-care co-ordinator, school liaison, parent trainer and community worker." Others have added the role of researcher.

### 100 tasks

The authors end with a list of a hundred specific job functions which fit into these categories — from providing parent-like supervision at the primary care level, through teaching social skills in the educational role, helping to develop self-esteem in the therapeutic role, to enforcing standards and programme design as an organisational manager and participating in training, supervision, advocacy and research as a professional.

Summarised from Small, R.W. and Dodge, L.M. (1988) Roles, skills, and job tasks in professional child care: A review of the literature. *Child & Youth Care Quarterly*, 17.1