**VIOLENCE PREVENTION
WORKSHOP FOR STAFF**

**PROGRAMMES FOR
YOUTH IN DETENTION**

**GERRY FEWSTER
CONSIDERS CHILD CARE
RELATIONSHIPS**

Merle Allsopp and Brian Gannon put their heads together to consider

Employment legislation and child care workers

from the editor

There is quite a buzz about the new Basic Conditions of Employment Act, and the fact that child care organisations are no longer exempt from its provisions. Maximum weekly working hours and minimum rest periods do not feel familiar to those who are used to very long hours with very large groups of very difficult youngsters.

One's first response is that the new legislation, and particular its application to our field, is a sign of progress.

- Have we not, after all, been advocating for the past thirty years for better conditions of service for child care workers?
- Have we not spoken out against the generally poor salaries, the often mean living conditions and grudging time off?
- Have we not been calling for more realistic hours of duty which would in turn allow us to offer a better service — avoiding the dangers of tiredness and impatience when working sensitively and creatively with children in need?

Reaching agreement

Employers and employees have both made progress on these issues.

For their part, child and youth care workers have moved consistently in recent years towards a professional approach in terms of training — in the development of their knowledge and skills — and also in terms of accountability — in their commitment of a code of ethics.

On the other side, we have seen a variety of responses from employers. Some have moved directly to no-nonsense eight-hour shifts, with staff living in their own homes off campus earning salaries which allow them to hold their heads high as bread-winners. Others have not been able to afford such progress, but have made serious efforts towards employment conditions which better reflect the dignity and reward which is due to those who do this work. Very few employers have continued with positively nineteenth century attitudes towards child care workers; most have done their best. Then along comes this new legislation which sweeps the whole debate aside and decides for us, and on the whole we should be pleased. The legislation is saying that this is the way we should be employing people, and is offering us the chance to work in a better way with children and young people in need.

The great divide

But in child and youth care the playing field is anything but level. If you seek the dividing line between the eight-hour shift plus routinely generous conditions, and the less coherent working hours plus barely adequate service benefits, look for the line between the state-run and the private institutions.

The state institutions will hardly notice any change in their employment conditions, having been used to such terms for some time now. But the private homes depend on a state subsidy (which has not been increased since 1993 and is currently about one-third of the costs incurred in state institutions) together with their own responsibility for raising funds.

Staff resources in the private homes have generally declined over the past five years, leaving them less able to afford reasonable conditions of service for staff — let alone now to be forced to more than double their staff in order to meet the demands of the new Act. The state which encourages these private homes to extend their services in order to contribute to the transformation of the child and youth care system is the same state which leaves the subsidy to decline in real terms year after year — and is the same state which now delivers this knock-out blow which most private institutions cannot survive.

Where next?

We should all be on the same side here. It is the state's responsibility to see that there are adequate services for children in care. Historically the state has provided the places of safety and the child care schools while the private sector has provided the children's homes. No matter where we stand on this new legislation, we will all do best to put our energies, in the spirit of this partnership, into finding a working solution, rather than into fighting each other. It is, after all, the children and youth in the care system who will ultimately be the beneficiaries — or the losers.

Peanuts — **By Charles M. Schulz**

YES, MA'AM, I HELPED MY SISTER WITH HER HOMEWORK

WE GOT ALL THE ANSWERS WRONG? HOW COULD THAT BE?

ANYWAY, I DID MY BEST.. I TRIED TO HELP HER...

ISN'T THERE MORE TO LIFE THAN GETTING THE ANSWERS RIGHT?

THERE ISN'T MORE TO LIFE THAN GETTING THE ANSWERS RIGHT..

PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE

The Child & Youth Care Scene

Life-space work has to do with the fact that, in most cases, we who work with children and youth in care share their lives in a much deeper and more extensive way than, say teachers or nurses — or even relations. In fact many kids are in care because their own parents were unable to share much of their lives, and we child care workers get the chance to offer young people a second chance at home and family experiences. Characteristically, we life-space workers use **every-day events** as the medium through which we make contact, do things together, make it possible for kids to manage, to succeed and generally feel better about themselves.

Here in South Africa we are in the middle of winter, and the child care scene may well be more focussed than usual on **every-night events** — the times when we find each other indoors, glad of the warmth, the mug of cocoa and the company. The youngsters are less likely to want to run about outside — they are more in hibernation mode. Are we taking advantage of the opportunities offered by this time of the year?

The seasons. We know that everyday events are largely dictated by the seasons — we can, for example, use sporting activities and picnics in the summer. Towards the end of the year it is exam season and our time is dominated by study times. Winter could well be talking times, conversation times, story times, remembering times. Just as we are constantly busy with the children's development — physical, educational, social — winter could be the special time when we concentrate on the *human* development, the *family* development, the together times when we listen more to their stories and let them reconnect with their own past, and the sharing times when we listen more to each others' hopes and plans for the future.

The other day I heard someone say "kids don't want to spend time with grown-ups any more" — and he was immediately challenged by a friend: **"Who told you that? Where do you get that idea from?"** Throughout history ideas and stories and values have been shared and passed between the generations. Child care workers have to do this when the other adults in the children's lives are not able to do so. If we are not going to make times when we can talk — around the supper table, in front of the fire, under the duvet, over the hot chocolate — we may as well be running boarding houses. Three meals a day, no more. Midwinter is **talking season.** If we are not already doing it, let's try harder on these winter nights to revive a grand old "every-day" family tradition.
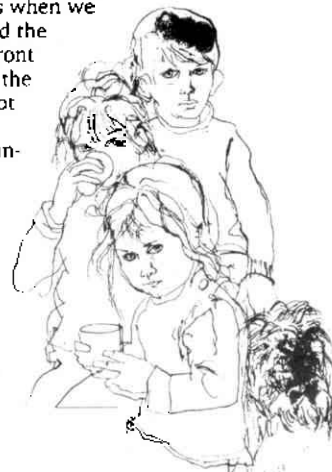
As child care organisations are asked to restructure into child and youth care centres and to develop preventive and early intervention programmes, many are not sure of the direction to take. The solution no doubt lies in the needs and opportunities which exist in your community. Here, for example, are the programmes which were funded last year by two state departments in the state of Minnesota. Do they give you any ideas for your programme?

Responsive interventions for children and young people

Wilder Forest Programme will establish youth councils and will include leadership and prevention camps, outdoor experiential activities, and teaching of leadership skills, self esteem and alcohol and drug awareness.

April's Shelter provides stable housing and support services to pregnant teens and young adult mothers.

B T Bombers Boxing Club provides a safe environment for high-risk, central city youth that includes an educational programme, recreational activities, positive role models, and boxing instruction.

Parents Anonymous offers a self-help education/support group for parents, as well as for incarcerated parents and young adults. Many of the 60 families served are single parent households with limited incomes and inadequate transportation.

Carver-Scott Educational Cooperative's **Juvenile Entrepreneurship Programme** for pre- and post-sentenced youth provides support, guidance, entrepreneurship training, and helps youth start small businesses.

The Family & Youth Collaborative will develop programmes to prevent, decrease, or intervene on violence and high-risk behaviours; activities include the DARE programme; weekend, after school, and summer activities; Teen Advisory Board; peer mediation; community service programmes for youth; and theatre groups.

Central Neighbourhood Improvement Association will involve youth in community revitalization efforts via creation of a youth committee, participation in youth economic development, creation of community mural and garden.

Chippewa County Family Services will add a Life Skills Worker position to enhance or add the following: life skills training, counselling, parent support group, youth support group.

Chosen Valley Public School is expanding their violence prevention efforts for at-risk youth and families, and will provide group counselling, mediation training, and alternative wilderness activities for at-risk youth and piloting an evening area learning centre.

Circle of Discipline uses boxing and martial arts programming to develop alternatives for high-risk youth; build sense of 'family'; encourage positive development, conflict resolution, school attendance, and job placement.

Dakota County Community Services will implement the curriculum Crossroads (for teens) and Roadmaps (for parents), which provide concrete steps for changing thought and behaviour patterns associated with delinquent behaviour. Crossroads is targeted for youth on probation.

District 2 Community Council will expand the existing Teen Council and arts education programme with training in conflict resolution, harassment prevention, cultural education, with teen-to-teen outreach and recreation.

Duluth School District Nettleton **Magnet School** is committed to becoming a school with zero tolerance for violence. Over 600 youth and their families will be involved in parent/child communication training, peer helpers, a parent resource library, and after-school activities promoting positive peer interactions.

Elk River School District: Over 900 students will be taught skills related to mediating differences in non-violent ways — complemented by *Proud to be a Parent*, a parent education programme, recreational activities for families, and an adolescent crisis intervention team.

Ely Community Resource, Inc's *Be the Best!* **programme** (Building Esteem, Support, and Trust) targets high-risk youth, age 5 to 12, experiencing problems including academic failure and social isolation. Of the 175 participants, at least 60 percent will be high-risk youth and their caregivers. *Be the Best!* will provide friendship groups, service learning opportunities, child-parent activities, and an adult-child mentoring programme.

City of Falcon Heights: The **Mayor's Commission Against Drugs** sustains a coalition which creates and maintains a safe and chemically healthy community. Activities include conflict resolution training, a newsletter, student involvement in planning and action councils, and minimising access to alcohol.

Faribault Community Services: **The Family Learning Programme** will break the cycle of at-risk behaviours passed from generation to generation by targeting young parents under the age of twenty-one and their preschool children. Parents will be helped to complete their basic education, provided parenting training, and connected to community resources as needed.

Fillmore School District **'Teens Nurturing Teens'** is a leadership skill building programme for students grades 9-12. Through peer empowerment and peer helping training, youth will help
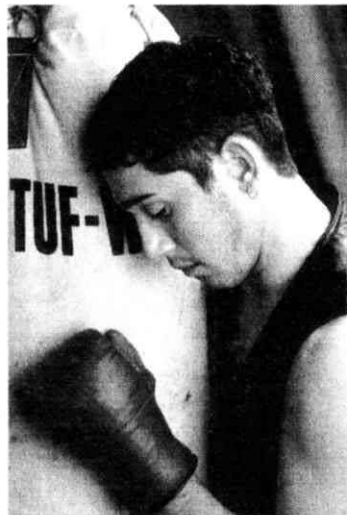
approximately 200 of their peers avoid drugs, violence, and crime.

Hennepin County Department of Community Corrections: Project **'Work Entry'** will provide comprehensive career and employability training to selected 14-19 year olds on probation.

Hibbing School District will provide for high-risk youth: curfew enforcement; part-time school social worker; mentor programme; open gym on weekends.

Intermedia Arts Minnesota will develop an ongoing performance group and mentoring programme for 50 adolescent African-American males. Work will address racism and a variety of issues of concern to young African-American men.

Intermediate District 287 West Metro **Education Centre** is opening the PRO-Teens classrooms to help 150 highly aggressive youth increase their academic success and mental health. Programmes provided include academic, mental health, community service activities, and urban and wilderness exploration programmes.

The Janet Rico Teen Centre is a volunteer-driven neighbourhood centre working to develop "working relationships" among neighbourhood adolescents, staff and other support agencies. Staff and volunteers assist teens in maintaining positive peer relationships, community service opportunities, inter-generational and inter-racial awareness activities and advocacy.

The KINSHIP programme provides supportive friendships for children between the ages of 6-18 with adults on a one-to-one basis and targets children who for a variety of reasons need an adult in their life other than a parent.

Lake of the Woods School District will plan and implement a peer helper programme for the 870 students in Lake of the Woods Schools.

Le Sueur-Henderson Schools District will establish a youth centre in Henderson to address the lack of after-school options for youth in the community.

Legal Rights Centre: At least 60 truant youth and their families will be involved in family mediation programme to identify the underlying problems relating to young person's truancy.

Lutheran Social Service of MN: The *Oh No! Eighteen* programme serves high-risk youth that are not eligible for services elsewhere. Activities include support groups, drug prevention education, independent living skill instruction, communication exercises and job seeking skill instruction.

Lyndale Neighbourhood Associations will work with the neighbourhood youth, parents ,and residents of a public housing high rise in this south Minneapolis neighbourhood, to identify and address youth needs.

Madelia Schools District will provide positive opportunities for at-risk Hispanic students and empower them to educate others regarding cultural diversity and

prevention of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.

Project Offstreets will help 50 homeless youth access services to stabilize their lives and provide consultation, increase collaboration, and provide advocacy for youth.

City of Minneapolis project will develop an enforcement and diversion programme for youth curfew/truancy violators through a community coalition involving city programmes, schools and community organizations.

Kids — Handle With Care is a project designed to help reverse the societal acceptance of physical punishment by teaching alternative discipline styles through public awareness and parent education. Includes parent-child workshops in each of the six school districts in the county, "Peace" day camps for youth grades K-5, middle and high school retreats emphasizing conflict resolution, and training for parents in positive discipline.

City of Moorhead: Seeks to increase the developmental assets of youth; develop consensus and core values; a community wide service initiative in which children and teenagers engage in service, thereby strengthening the community.

Nett Lake School District #7070: This project's goal is to reduce youth crime and drug use by providing after school, weekend, and summer activities; and peer tutoring for Nett Lake youth.

North Hennepin **Mediation Project** provides mediation services to first-time juvenile offenders and their victims with the purpose of (a) showing the juvenile how the victim was affected by their actions, and (b) developing consequences for the offenders to avoid recurrence of illegal behaviour.

Northwest Youth & Family Services will provide an after-school evening drop-in programme and youth activity centre for about 500 middle school, high-risk youth, ages ten to 15. Will include employment opportunities, training in conflict resolution and peer mediation for youth volunteers, and involvement in a neighbourhood Crime Watch Project.

The Arizona Bridge Project is an after-school and summer programme designed to provide at-risk 14-18 year olds a safe and supportive environment to learn, while offering a "bridge" for working parents whose schedules may not allow them to be at home at the end of the school day or during the summer months. More than 200 youth will participate in activities including performing and visual arts classes, tutoring, mentoring, and internships with commercial and non-profit arts professionals.

Osakis School District is initiating a violence and pregnancy prevention programme, *Respect Begins with Me*. Youth, teachers, administrators and parents will participate in workshops, appropriate curriculum will be used in all classrooms, with peer mentoring for grades five

through twelve. Issues addressed will include healthy, respectful male-female interaction, sexual harassment, sexual abstinence and pregnancy prevention.

Kids First is a youth enrichment programme to meet a list of needs prioritized by 300 young people. Task force members will pool financial resources and personnel to provide after-school and summer activities for youth.

Pine Point School will continue efforts to prevent, decrease or intervene in violence and related high-risk behaviours of youth, while providing education on self-esteem, conflict resolution, violence prevention and prevention of harassment.

Prior Lake School District will expand their violence prevention services to include a resource centre for parents, training and support for parents of at-risk high school youth, and peer mediation and conflict resolution training for youth grades 4-12.

Ramsey Action's **Side by Side Institute** will provide youth leadership, diversion, and anti-violence programmes with a strong culturally competent emphasis on restoration of at-risk youth. Services include a six-week residential leadership programme, job-seeking assistance, parent support, and academic assistance. Robbinsdale ISD #281: **Suspended Off the Streets (SOS)** is a programme designed for middle school students who are suspended from school. An SOS coordinator will supervise youth in community service activity for the duration of their suspension, providing safe, supervised activities for youth.

Embracing Resilient Youth proposes to work with first-time juvenile offenders and at-risk 4th graders to improve academic performance, create a connection between the youth and the community, reduce criminal activity, and increase cultural power and pride.

St. Joseph's Home for Children offers a community support programme which is an early in-home intervention

Child Youth Care

programme that will provide at-risk youth with tutoring, vocational education and social skills training to reduce the need for out-of-home placements and school failure. Parent support groups will be available as well. This is a co-operative venture between St. Joseph's Home for Children, Minneapolis Public Schools, Hennepin County Community Services and other youth and family agencies to help participating families stabilize their lives.

St. Paul Schools District: Home visitor services will be made available to 200 families. Home visitors strengthen and empower families and thereby strengthen the community, reducing the risks of community crime, drug use, and violence.

The Sibley Manor Consortium will work to increase and stabilize healthy relationships among youth of diverse cultures and their families by providing educational and social activities that increase self-esteem, understanding, and tolerance of participants. **The West Seventh Community Centre** will provide afterschool and summer programming for high-risk youth, ages 9-14.

West Side Citizens Organization's **Teens Networking Together** is a programme for youth age 12-21 focusing on youth empowerment and leadership development. At least 50 youth will assume leadership roles and plan recreational activities, educational programmes, and community service.

YWCA Duluth Youth Programme works with 300 at-risk youth providing educational and recreational activities after school, in the evening, and on weekends free of charge to children ages six and up — classes in cultural diversity, homework tutoring, performing arts classes, sailing and canoeing as well as Kids' Corner, Teen Nights, Girl Power and Summer Day Camp.

YWCA of Minneapolis offers a diversion programme for girls involved in or at risk of being involved in the juvenile justice system. The programme contains the four phases of diversion, prevention, wellness, and independence.

YWCA of St. Paul SELF Programme (Self Esteem and Leadership Fulfilment) builds girls' self-esteem to enable them to enjoy strong self-confidence, establish and maintain healthy relationships, and act toward others in non-threatening, non-violent ways. A minimum of 260 girls will participate in educational, enrichment and recreational activities.

Youth Express will develop and operate a youth-directed business (bike shop) to assist youth in developing marketable work skills, self-confidence, and the opportunity to be involved in all aspects of business operation.

Readers are invited to share their own experiences in planning and implementing new programmes.

Things to do with my child during the Holiday

Staff at the Durban Children's Home offered this list to parents at the start of the recent holiday. Perhaps you would like to adapt these excellent ideas for the children and families with whom your organisation works ...

Sometimes finding new ideas of things to do with our children can be difficult, especially when we find ourselves so busy with our everyday work and responsibilities. Here is a list of things to do over the holidays to help you come up with fun ideas. Some of the activities may not be best for your age child, but with a bit of thought you can adapt each one of these ideas. They're just one-line ideas, and the best way to get the maximum use out of them is to think about how, what and where you will do the activity. The more you put into it the more you'll get out of it.

It's simple activities like this that will help to build a stronger relationship between you and your child — and which give your child a more secure image of herself/himself. Some of the activities you'll do together and some your child will do on their own. But it is important to show an interest in each activity and share with your child, the excitement of everything they learned each day. Obviously there is so much more to building a relationship with your child, but forming the habit of doing special activities *together*, is a great place to start.

Day 1: Make a poster of winter safety tips with your child.
Day 2: Share family history, photos with your child.
Day 3: Watch an educational television show with your child and discuss it.
Day 4: Help child get a library card.
Day 5: Count the steps it takes to walk to the corner with your child.
Day 6: Read a article about the environment with your child.
Day 7: Have your child look for bugs. How many different kinds of bugs can he or she find? Size? Colour?
Day 8: Have child list all uses of maths around the house.
Day 9: Cut pieces of paper into shapes and paste them in a patchwork pattern with your child.
Day 10: Cook dinner with your child and show him or her dos and don'ts of food.
Day 11: Make up a board with your child.
Day 12: Have your child tell you a favourite story
Day 13: Have your child put an ice cube outside. How long until it melts? Until it evaporates?
Day 14: Ask your child to watch the moon & record changes in size and colour.
Day 15: Take your child on an outing
Day 16: Make finger puppets with your child. Cut the ends off the fingers of old gloves. Draw faces on the fingers with felt tip markers, and glue on wool for hair.
Day 17: Help your child find your town on a map
Day 18: Teach your child a new skill like setting the table.
Day 19: Ask your child to watch for numbers in TV shows and commercials.
Day 20: On trips, make a point of measuring distances and times.
Day 21: Encourage your child to take out 2 books this month from the library.
Day 22: Write a list of your child's favourite animals. Talk about what makes each animal special.
Day 23: Include your child in preparing a healthy meal.
Day 24: Explain origin of holidays, such as Youth Day or Freedom Day.
Day 25: Ask your child to write a thank you note or write a note to a relative or friend.

TILT!

When communication between the generations is difficult why not try another language — any language?

Our family, the Millers, had pinball machines the way raisin bread has raisins. It was a fact of life. But when Dad brought the first one home, I thought he'd lost his marbles. "Why on earth would you buy something so weird?" I didn't really expect, or get, an answer. "You could've gotten us a color TV set, like JoAnn's father, something the whole family could enjoy. But noooo ...

Dad picked the game up cheap because it didn't work. As usual, he took the phrases "doesn't work," "out of order," and "broken" as a direct and personal challenge to his abilities as a repairman.

Sure enough, before you could say "SPECIAL POINTS WHEN LIT!" he was calling us in to try it out, no dimes needed.

I glared at the electronic baseball game, my eyes flicking over the ugly peeling legs.

"I'll pass," I said, my words dripping teenage disdain. "That's definitely not my thing. I'm going to go read or something."

Dad just grinned. "I'll tell you what: Try it once, and I'll never ask you again."

Once was enough. My teenage memories are a blur of bonus points, home runs, score comparisons, and "Tilt!" signs. I developed ropy little "flipper muscles" from frantic button-pushing. A tremendous cacophony of bells and buzzers and whistles erupted continuously from the gadget. Our family room became a mob scene of kids flipping and muttering, "One more game and I'll go home," or "If I break a thousand, I'll go do my homework." Dad's contraption did wonders for the Miller kids' popularity.

Unique words and phrases crept into our vocabulary. "Tilt!" meant "You're wrong." "On replay" equaled "on second thought." "Buzz, ching, ching, ching!" was the same as "You're making bonus points!"

The pinball machines brought even the silly Millers to a new level of giddiness: games played with eyes shut, or backs turned, or with all of the silvery balls in play at one time. There were even shared games, with one person manning each flipper, both teammates screaming, "Get that — hit it, hit it!" and "Oh, no! Sorry!"

I was away at college when Dad casually mentioned over the phone that he'd sold the baseball pinball machine.

"What!" I shrieked, my college "cool" lost. "You sold our first pinball machine? Why don't you give away my baby pictures while you're at it?!"

"But I got another one, even better," Dad said. "It's called *Cross Town*. You're gonna love it."

"I've only got one thing to say to that," I said grimly. "Tilt!"

"I'll tell you what," he replied, "Try it once ..."

Dad's grandbabies achieved the customary developmental milestones — plus one: each learned to crawl, then walk, and then play pinball!

"Look!" They'd howl. "I beat Grandpa!" When the adults didn't want to play, *Cross Town* was quite the electronic baby sitter, teaching coordination, math skills, and perseverance — not to mention social arts, such as taking turns and winning/losing without gloating/pouting. The clamour of bells and shouting of "Oh no!" or "I can't believe it!" pinpointed the kids' whereabouts and what-abouts.

It had never occurred to me to wonder why Dad suddenly acquired the first pinball machine. But not long ago, my brother's friend told me what Paul Harvey would call "the rest of the story."

"Yep," Dave said. "I was about twelve. Your dad took your brother and me to the Reno Air Races. Somehow we ended up at a hotdog stand playing pinball for hours! Before I knew it, you guys had one in your home." He went on to say: "I wonder how many hours your brother and I flipped those balls rather than committing petty offences, dangerously riding skateboards, and otherwise entertaining ourselves in a questionable adolescent fashion. Your dad was a wise man."

"Let me set the record straight," I told him. "I'm not knocking Dad's wisdom, but he bought that game for one reason: so he could play with it!"

Later, though, I got to pondering. A friendly competition of pinball was just the right common ground for an introverted, solitary bookworm of a teenage girl and her outgoing, sociable athlete father. Nothing could lure me out of my room like the *"chingching-ching — Buzzzzzz"* of the machine turning on. And, at an age when brother and sisters would rather die than hang out with each other, it was definitely OK to spend an evening or a rainy Saturday morning battling siblings for the top score.

Maybe Dad's toy racked up bonus points I can only tally on replay.

— **Terry Miller Shannon** writing in *The Monitor*

Child & Youth Care

In this two-part article concluded this month, **David Maunder** compares the development of professionalism among youth workers in South Africa and Australia and suggests necessary and sufficient conditions for the maintenance of a professional body. The most important factors are a consensus about the values, goals and principles of youth work and government structures for the recognition of youth work as a profession. Other factors, such as tertiary training, literature and research are necessary but not sufficient for the development of a profession.

Youth Work Professionalism: A Comparative Perspective

Future prospects for the South African profession

Towards the end of 1996, Cristal De Saldanha moved from the role of director of SAAYC to act as full-time coordinator for YPAG. From midway through 1997, she was based at Technikon SA to facilitate the development of the youth work degree. At the end of 1997, she left to take up a position with the Commonwealth Youth Programme in London. In spite of an early notice of this move, the YPAG executive had at the time of writing, been unable to replace her. Shortage of funds has been suggested as a reason for this but it is clear that personal differences and internal conflict have occurred within the YPAG executive. Well qualified applicants have been interviewed and turned down. In consequence, provincial launches and the national launch are behind schedule and communications between national and provincial level are often the source of frustration. However, the Institutional Links Program has given a boost to the B Tech curriculum development and the masters program has provided a focal point for many YPAG leaders.

YPAG must not forget the lessons of the CCE pilot project. TSA has a yet very few staff employed to focus on youth work. Its child care staff share a similar objective but until the course enrols sufficient students to justify additional appointments (potential is estimated in thousands) YPAG must maintain an active dialogue to transmit its vision. The development of professional youth work training is incorporated into the National Youth Policy. This requires the National Youth Commission, in collaboration with other agencies, to develop a proposal for a professional youth work training program. A model must be developed to incorporate structured educational and training curricula within the National Qualifications Framework, accreditation of practical work and recognition of prior learning. Whilst to date the YPAG and TSA initiative has proceeded with little involvement of the NYC, the policy statement offers hope for the process. An additional factor is that AusAID funded a consultant to assist the preparation of the policy and its implementation and has suggested a closer connection with its Institutional Links Project. This has the potential to make professionalism a key issue in the implementation of the youth policy.

Progress in Australia

In Australia, professional youth work was given a significant boost by the Second World War. With large numbers of men in the armed forces and women entering the workforce to contribute to war production, governments became concerned about the dangers to and from unsupervised youth. National Fitness Councils with full-time organisers were established at state and federal levels, originally to increase the physical fitness of those who would enter the armed forces. The focus of National Fitness soon moved to the funding, organising and training for all manner of leisure activities for young people. Noting the British model of partnership with non-government agencies, National Fitness Councils established sub-committees(termed Associated Youth Committees) of youth agency representatives. In 1944, the Victorian NFC, in collaboration with churches and major youth organisations, initiated a course of training which was offered by the Melbourne University Board of Social Studies (i.e. social work). This ten month course did not offer a university qualification. The course produced about 80 graduates over the next four years and in 1947 was phased out and incorporated into the Diploma of Social Studies which was increased from two years to three years. The third year offered an optional specialism in group work and this was considered an appropriate course of training for youth workers. However, in less than a decade, all reference to youth work had been removed. (Irving, Maunders and Sherington, 1995:64-5) The course did provide sufficient sense of identity for the formation of the Victorian Association of Youth leaders which reached a peak of about 50 members and survived until the early 1950s.

In 1947, the YMCA established a training course in Sydney for its staff, based on the long established college in America. A number of classes were taken by staff of the University of Sydney and between 1947 and 1963, the course admitted 124 students, 78 of whom graduated. Following unsuccessful negotiations to affiliate the college with the University of New South Wales, it was moved to Melbourne in 1964.

A major inquiry into juvenile delinquency in the State of Victoria (the Barry Report, 1956) inspired a move to re-establish professional training. The National Council for Women and the short-lived Institute of Professional Youth Leaders developed a proposal for a course to be offered by the Melbourne Technical College. The state government refused to finance this as it was developing its own proposals for a training institute within its Department of Social Welfare, established in 1960. (Irving, Maunders and Sherington, 1995:178-180)

In 1965, the Social Welfare Training Council of Victoria launched its Diploma of Youth

Leadership. The existence of two courses in Victoria for professional youth work gave rise to the formation of a professional association, the Youth Workers' Association which was founded in 1967. Just a few years later, the YWA obtained a grant from the Myer Foundation to investigate the educational requirements of professional youth workers. This research covered the nature of the role of youth workers and their attitudes and characteristics. It concluded that workers were inadequately served by the two existing courses which offered no formally accredited qualification and that youth worker education should be located in the mainstream of tertiary education. (Hamilton-Smith and Brownall, 1973).

In the mid-1970s, representatives of the YMCA and Social Welfare Training Institute, together with the YWA, negotiated the transfer of youth worker training to the State College of Victoria at Coburg, a teachers' college which was diversifying its courses. A three year diploma course commenced in 1977 and a BA degree was offered from 1982. SCV Coburg was incorporated into Phillip Institute of Technology in 1982 and this in turn merged with the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology to form RMIT University in 1992.

In 1978, the YWA achieved a second major goal with the establishment of a state Youth Work Award covering the salaries, qualifications and conditions of service for youth workers. However, after the achievement of these goals, the YWA lost its direction. Youth workers' input in relation to the award was in the hands of the Australian Social Welfare Union, as the award was related to a wider Community Workers' Award. Membership of the YWA declined until it was wound up in 1982. The award continued until the early 1990s when the Kennett Liberal government dismantled state pay awards as part of a policy to increase flexibility in employment and to reduce union influence.

The events took place in Victoria, only one of the six Australian states. From 1960, the Commonwealth National Fitness Council played only a funding role not a development role in relation to youth work. In 1977, in the face of increasing concern at then rise in youth unemployment, the Commonwealth government established an Office of Youth Affairs to coordinate the work of government departments. The office was headed by John Way who had considerable experience of the non-government sector. The establishment of a government youth affairs structured challenged the non-government sector to consolidate. At this time there were two bodies representing non-

government youth organisations at the national level. The National Youth Council of Australia, (NYCA) which had been founded (with government financial support) in 1960 to provide representation for young Australians in the World Assembly of Youth and other international forums; and the Council of Australian Youth Organisations (CAYO) which broke away from NYCA in 1975 as a result of increasing generational tensions between younger delegates committed to radical action and the administrators of the traditional youth agencies. (Irving, Maunders and Sherington, 1995: 203-4) In 1979, a National Forum of State Youth Affairs Councils was formed and later that year, a conference of youth workers held in Fremantle established the Nationwide Workers with Youth Forum (NWWYF). These four forums, as they were known, comprised the Youth Affairs Council of Australia (YACA).

The NWWYF was originally intended to include both voluntary and professional workers, though the professionals dominated. Even so, it found difficulty in reaching agreement about its objectives, its constitution, even whether it should be part of YACA (as it was established to be). Its leadership was indecisive and gave no clear direction to solve these problems. The forum slowly went out of existence by the mid 1980s. This was in spite of initiatives by government which could have promoted professional development. The Office of Youth Affairs funded a major national study of youth workers education (Ewen, 1981) and funded YACA to develop training. New professional training courses were established in Western Australia and

New South Wales. In relation to International Youth Year (1985) an Interim Steering Committee on Youth Sector Training was established and state training councils funded. However, the committee showed a lack of consensus from the field on the goals of youth worker education and efforts to develop a national code of ethics and practice failed dismally. (Irving, Maunders and Sherington, 1995:302)

Other events served show the fragmentation of the youth work sector in the 1980s. In 1977, the Commonwealth government established a program for unemployed young people, the Community Youth Support Scheme (CYSS). The program developed as a broad support service for young people and with its community based committees, resisted central control. In 1982, the government attempted to abolish the program and failed because of the community involvement of backbench MPs. CYSS workers operated in a highly political environment and often worked to raise the consciousness of young people. They formed their own association and increasingly defined themselves differently from youth workers. In 1985, the Kirby Committee presented its report into Labour Market Programs and recommended that CYSS be reconstituted as a National Youth Service. CYSS workers condemned this proposal, still sensitive to attempts to terminate them and oblivious to the alternative. Government consequently restructured CYSS as Skillshare, a training program with no focus on youth, and a change of government eventually discontinued it in 1996. Workers with homeless youth also formed their own association and

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constructed themselves outside youth work. (Irving Maunders and Sherington, 321-3)

Professionalism in the 1990s: dying or reviving?

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Australia moved to deregulate the labour market and apply economic rationalism to the public sector. Industry Training Councils were established to bring employers, unions and government together to develop a competency basis to training. The Federation of Youth Sector Training Councils developed competencies for youth work and Victoria University of Technology was funded to develop a national curriculum in 1996. However, a government focus on multi-skilling has emphasised generic community service competencies and reduced specific youth competencies to nine. Broadbent (1998) has shown that certificate IV and diploma qualifications in community work and juvenile justice comprise over 90% of the requirement for youth work at that level thus undermining its status as a specific profession. Government is increasingly focused on specific outcomes such as job placement, rather than broader development objectives. Generic youth work is not funded and tenders are increasingly allocated to profit-making rather than community agencies. There have been some signs of a professional revival: at the national youth work conference in Hobart in 1995 there was considerable interest by delegates in forming a national association. At the Victorian state youth work conference later the same year the issue was debated with considerable support. However, one of the instigators left the field and the initiative came to nothing,

Necessary and sufficient conditions for professionalism

The comparison of events in Australia and South Africa may enable us to identify the social structures and conditions that will enable youth work to become established as a profession. Further comparison with the British Community and Youth Work Union, which, from origins as the Youth Service Association, Community Workers Association, Community and Youth Service Association and finally the CYWU, celebrates its 60th anniversary in 1998.

1. Probably the most important condition is a consensus of youth workers about the goals, values and practice of the work and a commitment to combine into a professional structure. Such a consensus is a prerequisite for the establishment of a code of conduct. This applies to South Africa, though the consensus is fragile and the code of conduct yet to be endorsed. It applies

in the UK where in the last decade, the CYWU has succeeded in limiting entry to the profession to those who are specifically qualified in youth work. Except for a short period in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Australia has lacked a consensus on professional youth work. Feminists have seen professionalisation as the imposition of a masculine, hierarchical tradition. Anarchists have seen any organisation as control and a check on consciousness raising. A code of ethics was opposed in 1985 as an unnecessary means of control. More recently, government has perceived such organisation as the protection of vested interest.

2. Conferences theoretically may help to develop consensus. In Australia they are often focuses for disagreement. The most recent national conference, more positive than most, still tried to serve youth workers, academics and young people. Occasionally, academics were accused of not relating research to reality and academics and youth workers accused by young people of using too much jargon. Too many felt guilty about this. An acceptance of the need for different perspectives and a support for professionalism is some way off.

3. A further positive factor is the appointment of a full-time paid organiser to publicise and implement those goals. This has been a feature of the British body and for a while a factor in the success of the South African one. The Australian YWA never had this. Whilst YACA did have paid organisers, the fragile relationship with NWWYF and the discord within that body limited their effect.

4. A major issue is the existence of structures which give recognition to youth work as a profession. South African structures such as the SAQA and Interim Social Welfare Council are strong incentives for professional organisation. England has had the Joint Negotiating Committee and National Youth Agency. The Youth Workers Award in Australia applied only to one state and once established, became to responsibility of a more broadly based union.

Other factors

It is argued that these factors, professional consensus and government structures for recognition, are necessary and requisite conditions for the existence of a youth work profession. There are other factors which are necessary but not sufficient. Tertiary training is a necessary factor in the preparation of professionals, but courses have existed in Australia continuously since 1947 and this has not provided a sufficient basis for unity. Because there is no registration requirement or restriction on entry,

qualified professionals have been outnumbered by others and demand for professional qualification consequently limited. Lack of career paths has also limited demand for entry. Likewise, the provision of a professional literature and data (provided in Australia by the National Clearinghouse for Youth Studies at the University of Tasmania, The Centre for Youth Affairs Research and Development at RMIT and the Youth Research Centre at Melbourne University and others) are a necessary but not sufficient factor in promoting professionalism.

The future

What are the future prospects? Will the youth work profession develop in South Africa and re-emerge in Australia. The first seems likely if agreement can be reached to appoint an effective organiser and if the consensus can be maintained, that is, if particular approaches to youth work can be kept under the overall umbrella. The profession may emerge in Australia if a new government recognises the marginalisation of young people and allocates resources for general youth development. A further factor is whether the existing courses can stay afloat, given diminished employment opportunities. Some universities have begun to suggest that resources might be used elsewhere.

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A 10-point do-it-yourself workshop for teams or individuals on

Violence Prevention

What can we do to stop violence? The problem of violence can seem overwhelming, but there are preventive steps each of us can take.

1. Change the personal factors that contribute to violence

- Think about the messages in your language and ensure the use of nonviolent words or phrases.
- Lower your stress level and learn to cope peacefully with stress.
- Learn to cope appropriately with anger and rage.
- Build and improve supportive relationships with others.
- Complete a high school education and seek higher education or further training. Improve your interpersonal and communication skills.
- Foster individual responsibility and accountability.
- If alcohol or drug consumption is contributing to violence in your life or the lives of those around you, seek treatment or support.
- Be involved in positive and constructive activities. Reduce your work hours and allow for time with your family and friends.

2. Keep your family free of violence

- Learn positive, nonviolent ways to resolve conflicts with your family members and others.
- Balance work and family time.
- Take parent education or child development classes.
- Encourage and support your children.
- Discipline your children in a consistent, nonviolent manner.
- Be a positive role model for your children. Discourage your children from acting in a violent manner.
- Provide a consistent, stable home life for your children.

3. Keep your workplace free of violence

- Promote and practice a work-place environment of open communication and respect where profanity, threats, harassment and other types of violence are not tolerated.
- Report any suspicious incidents that occur in the workplace.
- Supervisors and management should respond to incidents that are indicative of a potential problem.
- Take part in conflict resolution classes, interpersonal communication training, employee safety programs and employee assistance programs at your workplace.
- Support or establish a violence-free campaign at your workplace.

4. Foster a greater sense of community

- Strengthen efforts that foster, support and maintain human relationships and connectedness among families, cultures, organizations and communities.
- Develop the strengths, assets and capabilities of all individuals, families and communities.
- Support efforts to get to know your neighbours, such as neighbourhood gatherings or community projects.
- Foster mutual respect and human dignity for all people.

5. Educate yourself and others on violence and violence prevention

- Learn the facts about different types of violence.
- Learn about various violence prevention efforts.
- Support increased education and awareness of violence and violence prevention.
- Work to change the conditions in which violence is rooted, such as racism, sexism, homophobia, ageism, disability discrimination, class, religious bigotry.

6. Work to end those institutional factors that affect violence

- Poverty
- Unemployment, over-employment, underemployment, and inflexible work hours
- Overcrowded, unsafe, and poorly designed housing and schools
- Negative peer pressure
- Media promotion of violence
- Societal ambivalence toward violence
- Easy access to weapons
- Lack of after-school activities for youth.
- Proliferation of hate groups

7. Volunteer your time in some way that prevents violence

- Seek a group working to prevent violence and give of your time and/or money.
- Look to those near you for volunteer possibilities. Help a friend, neighbour, or relative who is a parent or parent figure by offering to baby-sit, supply transportation, run errands, read a book to a child or simply listen when support is needed.

8. Take some precautions against being a victim of violence

- Recognize the warning signs of rage and violence in interpersonal relationships.
- Plan your activities ahead of time.
- Trust your instincts.
- Be aware of your surroundings.
- Walk with a confident attitude.
- Learn basic self-defence.
- Know where your children are at all times.
- Ensure the safe supervision of your children.

- Make sure your children know their home phone number and address and are familiar with their home neighbourhood.
- Know about your children's habits, friends, favourite places, and other interests and activities.
- Have recent photos and/or videos of your children and their medical and dental records on hand.

9. Reach out for help if you cannot cope with a life situation

- Parents or other caregivers who feel they cannot cope with their community assistance hotline, talk with a doctor or social worker, or join a support group.
- Seek help to cope with your own issues of victimization or abusive tendencies.

10. Encourage decision-makers to be a voice for violence prevention

- Promote non-tolerance of violence in your community.
- Support and advocate for violence-prevention programs.
- Promote public policies that support children and families.

Points to remember ...

Violence is words and actions that hurt people. Violence is the abusive or unjust exercise of power, intimidation, harassment and/or the threatened or actual use of force which results in or has a high likelihood of causing hurt, fear, injury, suffering or death.

All sectors of the community — government, schools, families, religious institutions, businesses, cultural institutions, health-care providers, and youth groups — must be involved in violence prevention.

Prevention is essentially a local activity, giving communities a vested interest in violence prevention and increasing the commitment of positive change.

Prevention must be done in concert with efforts to assure public safety. If citizens do not feel safe in their homes and neighbourhoods, preventing violence will be hard.

Violence prevention must eliminate the risk factors that lead to violence and strengthen the protective factors that resist violence.

Violence prevention flourishes when a constellation of protective factors and policies combine to produce positive outcomes.

— Russell Kava and Ellie Webster

Child & Youth Care

This month we introduce a discussion by **David Roush** on good programming in youth detention facilities. In the concluding article next month we will look at therapeutic recreation.

The need for strong programmes for young people in detention

Juvenile detention is one of the most important elements of the juvenile justice system and one of the most difficult. Daily operations can be overwhelming, especially with the number of overcrowded, understaffed, and inadequately funded facilities. Despite the many common problems facing juvenile detention across the Nation, most detention facilities remain relatively isolated. The ability to visit other programs or to share ideas with colleagues is often seen as a luxury. The beliefs that each detention centre is unique and that what works in one facility cannot work in another frequently accompany this isolation. Under these circumstances, the exchange of ideas and program information is quite rare.

Renewal of Programming in Juvenile Detention

Juvenile detention is experiencing a renewed emphasis on programming. Programs are linked to improved conditions of confinement, reduced problems in crowded facilities, improved resident and staff safety, and increased resistance to liability (Parent et al., 1993) and Roush, 1993). On a larger scale, shifts in juvenile justice have placed greater importance on programs as a means of addressing the problems of serious, violent and chronic juvenile offenders (Krisberg, 1992; National Coalition of State Juvenile Justice Advisory Groups, 1993; National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, 1993; and Wilson and Howell, 1993).

As a part of the Juvenile Justice Personnel Improvement Project (JJPIP), the National Juvenile Detention Association (NJDA) conducted a nationwide survey of detention practitioners to determine the range of innovative and effective programs and concepts (Roush and Wyss, 1994). NJDA received 98 program descriptions containing 336 innovative and effective program ideas. The ideas were grouped according to topics. The most common are as fol-

lows, including the number of innovations listed in parentheses:

- treatment (37).
- detention education (28).
- substance abuse (18).
- activities (15).
- family and parenting programs (15).
- volunteers (15).
- behaviour management (13).
- social skills training (11).
- home detention programs (9).
- delinquency prevention programs (8).
- self-esteem programs (7).
- conflict resolution (6)
- vocational education (6).

The number of innovative ideas and the range of different program concepts indicate that a considerable amount of programming is occurring within juvenile detention facilities. Programs often do not receive attention or publicity due to nonexistent or subjective evaluation strategies. However, numerous descriptions indicate that program ideas have been in place for many years. The survey results create a very powerful response for those juvenile justice and juvenile detention practitioners who say that programming cannot or should not be a part of juvenile detention.

Rationale for Programs

The need for strong programs in any detention facility depends on the type of youth detained. Detained juveniles are the community's most troubled and most troublesome youth. The time they spend in detention is crucial. It is a period when their belief in themselves has been shattered and distorted. They are confined against their will, and earlier supportive relations of the home and community are severed as they pass beyond the locked door.

They bring with them considerable anxiety and hostility. Some are withdrawn, while others are extremely aggressive. Some are so disturbed that they do not dare show their true feelings. They are upset, and detention can make

them more upset. Many carry with them feelings of hostility toward adults, authority and society in general. Some have a strong identification with older delinquents and antisocial goals. Putting an upset youth in a group of other upset youth can only serve to compound problems unless proper measures are taken. What can detention do to halt what would seem to be a natural outcome? There are many goals of detention, but these goals appear to be the most immediate. Detention has the obligation to hold youth, curb their impulsive behaviours, and mend their social ills. The mending partially consists of controlling behaviour so that detainees do not harm themselves or others. It also means assisting other court personnel in forming a clear diagnostic picture, changing the youth's distorted views of themselves and their situation, offering some worthwhile goals, and preparing them for later treatment.

Although there is debate about the best approach for detention personnel to take in rendering programs to mend social ills, detention professionals have learned what not to do. One product of experience is a list of several approaches that do not work. These failed approaches include:

- being punitive.
- being repressive of all behaviour.
- being overly permissive.
- being inconsistent (permissive, then repressive).
- ignoring individual needs (being too group centred).
- Using "give them a good time" approaches.
- Failing to relate detention experiences to the youth's behaviour in the community.

Benefits

Even weak programs serve to reduce the number of problems in detention. Moreover, well-designed programmes are indispensable tools in accomplishing the many goals of detention. There is agreement about the following benefits of detention programmes:

Good programs keep the detained youth so busy that they do not have time to think of ways to vent hostility on detention. The value of keeping busy should not be overlooked. Youth give less thought to harming themselves, others, the building, and equipment. They give more thought to the positives that are an outgrowth of the program.

Through programs, youth are placed in many social situations that serve to alter their distorted views of themselves and their situation. Juveniles who need controls can be identified early. Their more aggressive and impulsive behaviour is controlled partly by the rules of the activity, partly by the opinion of their peers, and partly by the close supervision of the staff.

A variety of situations gives more opportunity for a quick evaluation of a youth's strengths and shortcomings. Programs provide for interaction among the youth. Without interaction, it would be difficult to spot the withdrawn youth. He or she is more easily noticed and more easily helped through one or more of the activities. Many times, a certain activity allows the staff to penetrate the wall of hostility that a youth has for adults. Like programs for the mentally ill, one certain activity can be the start of a rehabilitative process for a withdrawn youth. Detention is not geared to rehabilitation, but it can start the process.

Confined against their wishes and afraid of their surroundings, associates, and their future, many youth experience increasing tension. Good programs should provide for a release of emotional and physical tensions. The programs should be varied in order to find activities that will "unfreeze" the youth.

A universal trait of delinquents is that they have little regard for their own ability and worth. They lack confidence in themselves. Good programs can help them discover hidden abilities, develop new skills, learn basic facts, and develop new feelings about their responsibility to improve. They can come to a more realistic appraisal of themselves.

A youth worker's success in detention is greatly dependent on the warm, trusting relationship that is possible between staff and juveniles in their charge. It cannot be overemphasized that programs are one of the best means available in establishing such a relationship.

A direct approach by a staff member causes the untrusting juvenile to back away and set up a barrier between himself or herself and the adult. When the youth leader "comes in the back door" by being a teammate in a volleyball game, by giving reassurance during crafts projects, or by helping the group win the housekeeping trophy, he or she is able to share good feelings with the youth. The youth and staff member are working together and

doing what is appropriate, before either one realizes it.

One of the greatest benefits of good programs may be that they help the staff member see detained youth for what they are rather than for what they have done. Well-run programs encourage good staff-juvenile relationships.

Programs must be available to all youth at the earliest opportunity in any detention facility. Detention staff must always ask how the delivery of programs can occur rather than why the delivery of programs cannot occur. A detention facility must see as its mission both addressing resident and public protection and affording the youth it serves maximum opportunities for individual growth and change regardless of the length of stay. The topic area of programs will help a staff member
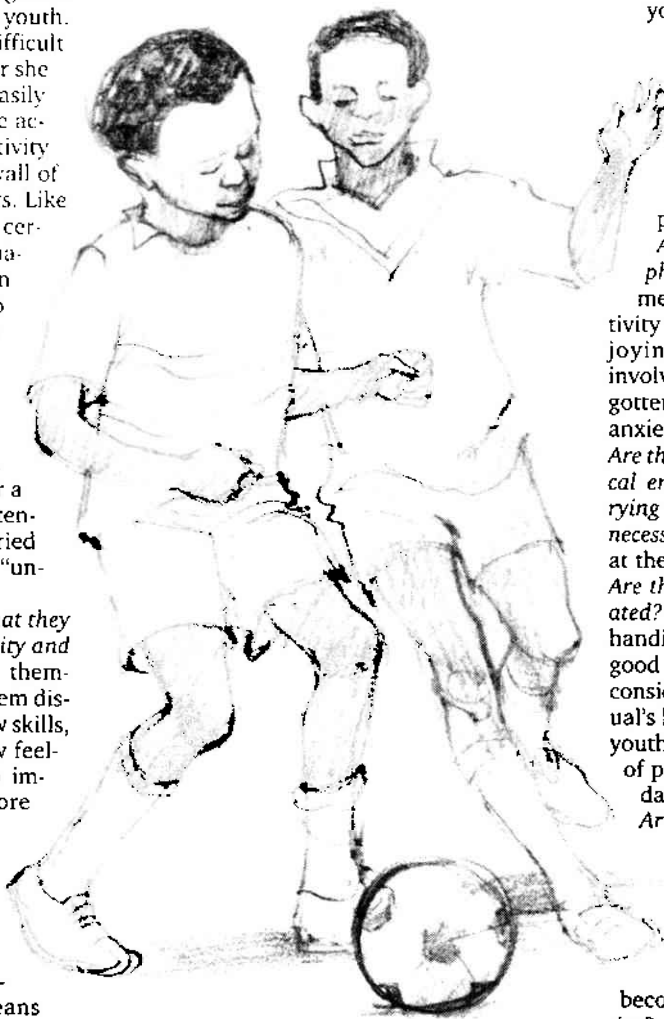
understand the goals of programs, the characteristics of poor programs, and descriptions of key program areas.

Goals of Programs

For every type of activity, physical or non-physical, there should be at least six of the following goals that can be reached by having that activity. If not, then the activity should not be held. These goals are:

- Providing for a release of emotional

tension. Providing a constructive outlet for physical energy.
- Teaching fundamentals of recreational activities.
- Giving the youth self-confidence in wholesome pursuits.
- Teaching fair play, rule following, and teamwork.
- Providing a socially acceptable outlet for hostility.
- Giving the youth a better understanding of himself or herself.
- Developing new interests and skills to be followed upon release.
- Keeping the youth busy by providing a structure for his or her day.
- Developing good health habits and physique.
- Breaking down resistance to adults and adult standards.
- Permitting observation of the youth's behaviour, which aids in social diagnosis.

The following outline serves as a more comprehensive explanation of the goals and their meaning to everyday work. Review each of the goals, and see if the activity will answer the questions in a positive manner.

Are the youth emotionally as well as physically involved? Are the youth merely carrying out their role in the activity to satisfy staff, or are they really enjoying the activity? Are the youth involved to the extent that they have forgotten temporarily all their problems and anxieties?

Are the youth really exhausting their physical energies in the activity, or are they carrying out the motions with as little effort as necessary? Are they physically exhausted at the end of the activity?

Are the abilities of each child being evaluated? What does he or she lack? What handicaps does he or she have? How good is the youth? Do we give as much consideration as possible to the individual's lack of knowledge or skills? Are the youth being taught the correct methods of play? Are they being taught the fundamental skills of the game?

Are we building self-confidence in the youth, or making them feel more inadequate? Are we subjecting the youth to ridicule and embarrassment by the staff or other detainees? Are the youth being encouraged to learn and improve, becoming more confident of their abilities? Are the youth experiencing a successful feeling of accomplishment? Do we praise the youth for their efforts as well as their achievements?

Are the rules of each game being taught? Are the youth being shown, and do they understand how the game can be better when the rules are followed? Do they see the importance of working together as a team, and the harm of playing as individuals? Are explanations given and examples set by staff guiding youth toward fair play? Do they witness a cooperative relationship between staff?

Does the activity allow for a release of aggressive feelings? Do we avoid creating resentment toward the activity by not putting them in positions that are embarrassing or humiliating?

Do the youth see themselves as being successful in the activity? Are we providing proper levels of competition, which increase confidence and eliminate feelings of insecurity?

Are the youth being taught new forms of recreation? Are we developing good attitudes toward various skills and activities? Have we developed the skills and created the interest that will encourage continued participation upon release?

Do we keep the youth so busy that they do not have time to think of ways to vent their hostilities on detention? Do we have a balance of both active and inactive recreation to keep them either physically or mentally involved throughout the day? Do we avoid lengthy periods that contribute to or reinforce feelings of self-pity, resentment, or despondency?

Are youth experiencing a feeling of well-being, and do they understanding it to be a result of physical fitness acquired through the program? Do we avoid imposing standards that are too strenuous or physically harmful to the juvenile?

By our every action, do we gain their respect for us and possibly for other adults? Are they resentful because they feel they must accept our standards, or do they participate because of their desire to accept our values? Do staff follow the same rules and regulations the youth are expected to — win, lose, or draw? Do they see staff members as part of their team, trying to help and cheering for them to win, or do they see only uninterested adults carrying out their duties? During leisure time, class sessions or competition, do we convey the feeling that we are interested? Are our efforts to help them adjust and mature real, or can they detect signs of phoneyness? Does our need to "always be right" interfere with their relying on us to "always be fair?"

Are we observant of a youth's change of attitude and interest throughout the day? Do we notice and record the comparative levels of skills and knowledge in each activity? Are we sensitive to changes in peer relationships? Do we notice how the various settings alter juvenile-adult relationships? Do we provide varying juvenile-adult relationships and notice the changes in response? Is there enough stimulation and freedom in activities for the above characteristics to reveal themselves?

Next month: Therapeutic recreation

For those working in youth detention facilities — if you have any requests for material on subjects of concern to you, please contact the editor: Either telephone 021-788-3610 or fax 788-9423. E-mail: pretext@iafrica.com

Instant gratification

You know how kids from deprived backgrounds are so often short on patience? They see something they want – and they want it now! They display a sort of anxious, grabbing urgency, afraid that they will miss out on something, scared that they will have to go without.

It's not so hard to understand. In the animal world, food, warmth and mating are some of the dominant drives – which have to be satisfied before there is time left over to lie in the sun or to play. Indeed, so urgent are these drives that, when frustrated, animals will attack and kill to satisfy them. A hungry cheetah is not going to be polite in order to spare the feelings of its parents, let alone a passing buck. "I'm hungry now – or soon will be – and I'm not going to let this chance pass."

Survival instinct

Tame animals in the zoo and domestic animals at home lose some of these urgent and dramatic traits (not all of them, of course) as they come to expect that they will be fed regularly by their owners/keepers. Wild animals, or those who have not been looked after, remain alert, decisive and opportunistic when it comes to meeting their basic and important drives and needs.

We know this is true with unsocialised and deprived children. Most of us work with these children day by day. When their lives have been difficult and they have not been looked after, for the sake of their own survival they have had to remain pushy, assertive and determined.

To children whose needs have been adequately met, the behaviour of deprived children often seems infantile, impolite, ugly and aggressive. They plead and demand, they are impatient and always at the head of a line for anything being handed out — and above all, they can't wait: they become anxious when made to wait. What they want, they want NOW. They seek what we call "instant gratification."

... and us?

But this feature is not really about the children — it's about us. Do we child care workers recognise ourselves in these descriptions of the "instant grats brats" – just a teensy weensy similarity in our own inability to wait, our tendency to make immediate demands on

youngsters and to expect instant responses?

How often do we say to children "You will do this at once. I am not going to wait. I want this cleaned up now!" I'm not sure why we do that — it probably has something to do with our sense of authority, our demand for respect and obedience. Or we are anxious that, when things don't quite go our way, we are losing control. Or we're tired and less than creative at the end of a day or a shift.

The easy way?

But there is a worse way in which we child care workers often seek instant gratification. It is when we expect performance and compliance from a youngster who has never had the chance to learn how. It is when we believe that we can correct a lifetime of deprivation and wrong learning by simply demanding good behaviour. It is when we say to a 15-year-old for whom life has always been harsh and denying: "I am going to give you one chance to prove yourself. If you screw up, you're out of here!"

Do we really believe that a child who has lived with deprivation, with hunger and the threat of hunger, with negative or destructive role-models (or no role-models at all) — do we believe such a child can satisfy our expectations of good behaviour on demand? "You behave yourself!" we hear ourselves saying, "Stop doing that! Be patient (polite, industrious, successful ...)"

A fifth grade teacher has no right to expect a pupil to do long division sums if these have never been taught. The teacher cannot simply demand performance. The sixth grade can expect the pupil to do these sums — and even then, if the pupil doesn't succeed the teacher will have to ask two questions: "How well has the pupil learned?" and "How well have I taught?"

But there is no quick way to success. There can be no instant gratification. Just as we expect children to develop patience and to be able to wait for things, so we as child care workers or principals or social workers must know how to wait — and what we must do together with the child in the mean time to reach our goals.

"... and I expect 100% from all of you!"

Making Bubbles — the fine art of child and youth care

Recent conversations with Thom Garfat and discussions with some of my colleagues at Malaspina University-College have convinced me that, despite all the words and rhetoric, the profession of child and youth care remains essentially undefined and generally unfocussed.

Glancing back over previous issues of the *Journal of Child and Youth Care*, I find that many who practise under this banner are concerned primarily with finding solutions to identified problems such as violence, suicide, delinquency, and alienation. Then there are those who seem more preoccupied with advocating for, or implementing, particular programme designs and methodologies such as "Positive Peer Culture" and "The Teaching Family Model," while others see themselves as ambassadors for specific approaches like behaviour modification, cognitive restructuring, or narrative therapy.

When it comes to the question of focus, many contributors direct their attention toward specific contexts such as the classroom, the family, or the community, and those who advocate a broader perspective discuss ideologies ranging from humanism and feminism to normalization and "tough love."

But none of this seems to distill down to anything that might be viewed as the *essence* of child and youth care — that distinctive core that defines our work. Nor can we gain any real sense of the parameters that might differentiate this profession from any other form of child-related activity.

Although some might argue that things should be left this way, I've always harboured a dream of participating in a self-conscious process with colleagues who share some common sense of meaning and purpose — a sense of identity, if you like. At the very least, I've wanted child and youth care to actually exist in some manifest and definable form that can converse with itself and speak back to our muddled and misshapen world — let's hear it for the *Journal of Child and Youth Care*.

As I see it, the creation of an identity is an ongoing process of reflected experience, whether we are talking about a profession or an individual. In either case, there's no fixed outcome, only a growing sense of meaning, location, and purpose as an emerging Self interacts with the experiential world.

As one thread within the collective consciousness of child and youth care, I have a sense of responsibility to contribute the reflections on my own experience to the tapestry. So, once again, I beg your indulgence as I consume the rest of this editorial space to offer a few thoughts that have been running through my mind over the past few weeks.

The individual child

First and foremost, I remain convinced that this profession must always keep the individual child or young person as its focal point of concern. For me, those who would give primacy to particular problems, contexts, methods, theories or ideologies have stepped outside this sacrosanct boundary. This is not intended to invalidate either their views or their practices, nor to suggest that these concerns have no place in professional child and youth care. The issue is where the *primary* point of interest and source of information is located: within the child or within some external or abstract framework of understanding. It's quite possible, for example, for systemic or ecological ideas to be translated into particular methodologies and incorporated into programmes designed to serve identified groups of kids, but once the experience of the young person becomes secondary to the framework, the essence of professional child and youth care has been abandoned. In other words, these

things should be considered as responses to the experiences and needs of the individual and not as some *a priori* condition into which the person is conveniently slotted.

Two points of departure

Unfortunately, our technological world bestows expert and professional status on those who seem to possess clearly delineated methods or techniques, backed up with abstract knowledge. Those who know *about* kids are generally considered to be more "expert" than those who have taken the more complex path of trying to know and understand the kids themselves.

In my experience, these are two separate points of departure that can end up in very different, if not conflicting, places. When these positions become polarised, as they often do, I will always take the empathic-subjective understanding of the person over the alternative option of fitting the person to some conceptual-objective framework of reality.

Again I want to stress that I don't consider these positions to be necessarily oppositional or mutually exclusive. The issue is where we begin and where we end; for me, it's always the same place — the subjective world of the individual child.

The world of the child

Having created this foundation, I realize that I will end up with a radically different picture of a profession though, frankly, I'm not quite sure how it would look in any evolved form. Simply stated, my most basic task as a professional child and youth care worker becomes one of trying to grasp what it might be like to live within the phenomenological world of the child. My reasons for doing this are very simple. In the first place, I am a part of this world. The meaning of whatever I do will be created in this world and the impact of my presence will be fundamentally influenced by what takes place there. Second, I want that child to know that he or she is being seen and heard by someone who is not tied to the agenda of any context, other than the context that we might create together. Finally, by reflecting back what I see, I invite the child to become "known" to Self and others, whether this be within the family, the classroom, or the community, and I invite those others to respond directly to the child, and not just to the protective armor of his or her behaviour.

This is not to suggest that the young person should not be held responsible for her or his behaviour. On the contrary, it is only through the emergence and acceptance of Self experience that a person can become truly Self-responsible. Nor is this intended to re-

place, usurp, or in some way undermine others in the child's life. As my involvement is likely to be very short term, it is my professional responsibility to work toward the enhancement of all significant relationships that make up the life-world of the child. In the short term, however, I work to create an additional context, with the child at the centre, through which the experience of the child can be known and expressed. This co-created context is, of course, the child and youth care relationship.

A bubble

I like to think of this new context as a kind of bubble that, for a period of time, attaches itself lightly to the ecology of the child's world and offers a potentially new source of information to all the systems that connect to that child's life. Conversely, it also serves as a shared reception area for information coming in from those systems: a place where data can be gathered, sorted, and analyzed, without the usual judgments and expectations inherent in each context. While sharing this bubble, I am primarily a facilitator. It isn't my role to stand between the young person and the world but rather to help create and maintain the contacts, shine the light, and hold up the mirror. Though I may, at times, find myself in the position of teacher, or even disciplinarian, I will always return to the bubble, making sure that the child remains at the centre.

Life in the bubble can be as strange and unfamiliar to the practitioner as it is for the child. The usual expectations simply don't apply and the standard professional tool-kit is virtually useless. To work effectively here, I must be able to bracket off my own theories and peer into the child's world through the eyes of my own innocence. Somehow I must suspend my own agenda to change or fix whatever I find there (a very difficult task for committed helpers) and learn how to listen to what parents, teachers, and other professionals have to say without allowing their views to contaminate the picture or distract me from my primary purpose (a particularly difficult position for someone at the bottom end of the professional totem pole).

And, when there's just the two of us, I must be sufficiently aware of my own issues and experiences to know where I end and my young partner begins. I must be sufficiently secure in this sense of my own boundaries to stand firm in the face of closure, rejection, even hostility, never closing the door on my own curiosity by tagging, labelling, classifying, and generally behaving like an expert.

My work is to help create a climate in which the Self of the child can be

> **Those who know *about* kids are generally considered to be more "expert" than those who have taken the more complex path of trying to know and understand the kids themselves.**

safely revealed and accepted warmly by another Self — my own.

As a professional I must learn to live with the humility of knowing that I will never really understand how it is to be in any life other than my own — that the benefits are derived only from my trying. I must learn to accept that I will never be able to fix or change someone else's life no matter how much I find myself compelled to do so.

No outcome, just process

As a professional, I must understand that there is no nice clean outcome to be defined and measured here, only an ongoing process that is impossible to describe other than from my own experience. Yet, as a professional, I will also attempt to describe and delineate that experience as carefully, clearly, and honestly as I possibly can; not so that it can be replicated or to save others the trouble of going there, but rather to document the evidence that each and every life can be approached as a unique and fascinating mystery.

And in all of this I must come to terms with the certainty that the child who lives that life is the only potential expert. Some humility for a professional stance!

But for those who are not ready to cast aside all the trappings and trimmings of a traditional profession, please be assured. Beyond the feelings to be experienced, the stories to be shared, and the pictures to be painted, there are also skills to be acquired, knowledge to be accumulated, and wisdom to be gained. Like a traveller in the forest, each pathway of every life offers unique learning possibilities but, with each pathway travelled, the skills become more highly attuned, the understanding of how the forest provides for the fauna and flora increases, and the fear of walking alone is replaced by renewed confidence and curiosity. But those who wish to continue learning will always be searching for new pathways to explore. At no point do they embalm themselves in the belief that they know how each tree came to be and how the forest really works. Yet, sooner or later, they will know, beyond any shadow of a doubt, that they have never really walked alone. ∎

Himla Makhan and **Dolly Naidoo** attended the recent CINDI (Children in Distress) Conference in KwaZulu Natal on behalf of their local NACCW Region. They report back briefly to colleagues.

Raising the Orphan Generation

The conference, Raising the Orphan Generation, held in Pietermaritzburg from 9 to 12 June 1998, was hosted by CINDI (Children in Distress). We had the opportunity to listen to representatives from UNICEF and delegates from other international agencies who are significantly involved in the HIV/AIDS and orphan generation.

Programmes
Programmes initiated at grassroots level in some African countries were very much community based, including
- Home based care
- Aids support group
- Groups working in collaboration with existing established institutions
- Village to village support groups

The FOST (Farm Orphans Support Trust) programme uses the commercial farms in Zimbabwe and seeks to avoid costly and culturally undesirable institutional care by keeping children in their communities of origin.
The COPE programmes collaborated with the village head persons and volunteers to implement a set of interventions intended to assist Aids-affected families and children.

The scope of the problem
The conference brought to light the magnitude of the problem we are faced with in dealing effectively with young people orphaned by HIV/Aids.
As Gracia Machel stated in her opening speech, we need to put our working differences behind us and work collectively to deal with this harsh reality. We also need to change our mind-sets and see HIV/Aids not as an adults' problem but as a children's problem. We need to leave our small territories behind us as we face the challenge of this pandemic.
In essence we have to adopt a children's rights perspective when we find ways to support children as they strive to cope with the tragedies of HIV/Aids.

Statistics and information
It was frightening to hear of the high infection rates in KwaZulu Natal. The global statistics presented focussed on the vastness of the epidemic.
Since HIV/Aids is not a notifiable disease, that statistics given are often innaccurate and they could be worse. Research has been done on the psychological needs of children going through

the traditional customs associated with grief, death and dying.
There were also research findings on work with orphaned children which was based on the strengths and capacity of communities.

Managing the crisis
Some of the formal alternative solutions looked at were adoptions and foster care, but the focus was more often on the less formal, the emphasis being on skills and income generating projects to sustain community-based programmes. In the Zambian programme reported on, the youth themselves are involved in policy making decisions.

UNICEF's involvement focuses on global and regional support, planning, developing and evaluating programmes to ensure that they are effective, adequate and sustainable.
Advocacy regarding Aids needs to be high on people's agenda — with a high level of political commitment.
To date UNICEF's programmes have included the following:
- 1988 Aids as an impending calamity for children
- 1990 Global aid into regional programmes
- 1991 Aids and orphans in Africa
- 1992 Aids and the second decade – a focus on youth and women
- 1993 International technical support group initiated
- 1994 Action for children affected by Aids – programmes, profiles and les-

sons learned
- 1995 SAR – strategy for programming to scale
- 1996 Child protection policy – proposed strategy for programme intensification (Jan 98 – Dec 99)

Objectives of current programmes for children, families and communities are to develop a global knowledge base of management and measurement tools to ensure that programmes are adequate over the long term.

Rights
Children's rights were highlighted by Kitty Barret as follows:
- Children below 18 years need special care
- The right to express his or her opinion
- The right to non-discrimination
- Protection of children without families
- The right to health and medical care
- The right to social security
- The right to an adequate standard of living
- The right to education, developing personality and standards.

Ms Barret's proposals centred on a charter on the rights of the child, the responsibility of the state, government policies and practices, national legislation, access to legal services, and the responsibility of the family.
In conclusion some of these issues were highlighted. Religion must play a more significant role. Churches need to get involved in this new struggle and give a voice to the voiceless. Models of care must be reconsidered in the light of new ideas, by restructuring and pilot projects to develop viable resources and networking.

To the Chairperson, Executive Committee and members of the NACCW in KwaZulu Natal we would like to express our sincere appreciation for the opportunity to attend the CINDI Conference. It has made us aware of the reality of the epidemic we are faced with, and the need for us to focus our child care efforts on the HIV/Aids generation. We would gladly share the information and knowledge gained from the conference with our colleagues in the child and youth care profession.

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Organisation and leadership

Organisation, good or bad for us?

Speaking about day care and residential care we do not only need an organisation to implement the work, but a way of working which is in accordance with the principles of working methodically. There is a close interaction between working professionally, our leadership, and *organising* our work. The question is — how do we run a centre in such a way that the active participation of the residents or visitors and the staff is maximized? The organisation is seen as a community with an opinion about working professionally and which is constantly searching for ways to realize the institutional goals in any given situation.

In these three articles we will explore the task of the care centre in recognising the uniqueness of every situation and every person. It is difficult to reach a comfortable balance between the work to be done and the interests of all, because so many people are involved – youngsters and staff – and the staff represent a wide variety of professions, backgrounds and skills, each with different opinions about the work.

Within an organisation, tasks and responsibilities are divided and shared. The residents and the staff, together, are shaping the culture of the organisation by the way they fulfil their tasks. Is it too idealistic and unrealistic to hope that we can achieve all the work *in dialogue*, with all of us listening to everybody else's contribution? It is, of course, not realistic to expect a dialogue at every moment between all the people involved. But important events and possibilities for treatment, and for working methodically, can easily get lost or overlooked in the everyday practice of the organisation. But this doesn't mean that we should be unaware of the need for and the possibilities of good dialogue in the organisation. When we talk about wanting to work in dialogue, we consider the division of tasks and responsibilities and recognise that the commitments and experiences of the various staff members are different. Their professional training varies as well as their practical experience and theoretical knowledge. Some have had much experience; others have just arrived. In dialogue, all experiences are valuable. Someone who has just arrived can be of great help by being in a position to question the culture of the organisation. She may have a more unprejudiced view than those who have been around for a long time. For the older staff it is more difficult to sense whether the organisation feels open or closed for newcomers.

Parallels with practice

This observation is also true for residents as well as for workers. The young people, their families, and individual child care workers all have very different expectations of the organisation and different insights gained from their own points of view. Acting responsibly and co-operatively within our organisation has many parallels with practising methodically within our profession. For instance, clarifying the factual situation at any one moment, reflecting on personal interactions, and looking back to evaluate what has happened, are as important in the organisational context as they are in our child care practice. Within the changing organisation, the question of what our aims are and what means we use to reach them, are just as relevant as when we are helping people to live their lives.

Leadership

Special attention has to be given to the way the organisation is led. The style of leadership has far-reaching consequences for a climate of dialogue, of shared responsibility and of using everyone's personal skills. Most organisations have long histories. It takes time to become an organisation with an 'own culture' and this can never be reshaped in a short time. As with people, we have to take into account the organisation's past, its present and its future. An interesting thing about dialogue is that it has to be practised and experienced. Talking about dialogue and good intentions are not enough, neither in working methodically nor in organisational co-operation. People have to feel that they are taken seriously. To be asked for your opinion is one thing, but to feel that you have been heard can only be concluded from the experience. Quite a different way of working is getting orders and then doing the work as directed by others who prescribe what should be done. This is working without dialogue —but also without seniors being interested in the insights and experience of those who do the work 'at the coal-face.' In such an approach, reflection is neither needed nor wanted. Working methodically and learning and growing as we work is not possible under such conditions.

Who is doing what and who is accountable?

It will be clear that an organisation is something made by man. An organisation can be described in terms of tasks and responsibilities, in division of the work which has to be done to realize the goal the organisation. When the work is done by twenty or by more than 100 people, arrangements are necessary, for example, about how to communicate, about participation, leadership, decision making and the financial management. Every organisation will have the intention to improve at working professionally with the residents.

The connection between the decision-makers at the top of the organisation and the workers 'on the ground' easily gets lost. Different 'languages' easily separate those who are involved with financial questions;

the managers as the 'chiefs' having the overall view in the organisation; the often university-educated professional staff; and the life-space workers as the practitioners, often with a lower status and less education but in direct contact with the residents and their emotional appeal. The consequence of these different viewpoints and 'languages' is a mutual feeling of distrust where we expect dialogue and reciprocal support. For example, with those in direct contact with them, the emotional appeal of the residents can be very strong and demanding. To find a good balance between this emotional involvement and a more reflective distance can become a problem when we are not aware of the position of the life-space workers within the institution. The combination of the high emotional involvement. less education and lower status in the organisation makes them vulnerable.

They are in direct face-to-face contact; for all the others working in the organisation it is easier 'to close ones eyes' when the reality is too strong. The person at the top has the responsibility for taking often far reaching decisions — and without making decisions at the right moment the organisation will be in chaos. Without strict maintance of rules, strong feelings of uncertainty prevail.

An organisation whose work is based on dialogue is a difficult challenge, because the principal has to be alert and diligent, staying in contact with residents, staff, relatives, neighbours. etc. Not all leaders 'at the top' long for dialogue. A whole organisation can often be based on the 'view of the boss', the person with the power to make decisions. He knows what to do. He decides on choosing his advisers and experts needed to make responsible decisions. He considers it his duty to take care of the organisation by telling everyone what should be done.

Some staff might prefer this approach which allows them to be less responsible themselves. In case of mistakes they can point at 'the responsible man', the boss.

This approach is quite different from sharing opinions and looking for opportunities to give someone the responsibilities for the work he has to do. In this work leadership is, above all, good listening to what is needed and making use of everybody's insight and experiences. The leader must be aware of what is needed to carry out a certain task. Leadership means to be attentive to the differences between the separate tasks — and to their interdependency within the overall goals and structures of the organisation. The leader makes it possible for everybody to concentrate on her or his work.

We have been comparing two types of leadership. This second type is related to good practice, to working methodically in a spirit of dialogue and shared responsibility.

Organized reflection

Reflecting is a key word in our view of working methodically. Reflecting cannot to be left to coincidence but has to be organised, structured. Organized reflection requires time, some distance and room for discussion, clarity on the goals of the meeting and good leadership.

In our article *Being, Acting, Reflecting* in the May 1998 issue of this journal, we emphasized the need to explore what is happening by giving it words, deciding what is important and involving other people in this process.

In more complex situations where people's whose reactions are very strong and not easy to understand, we have to inquire thoroughly, moving from one experience to an other. Searching and clarifying our experience in this way includes hesitations, asking questions, making mistakes, keeping pathways open and changing directions.

We can only do this in an atmosphere which is open to exploring, to questioning and to changing our minds. We have to realize that asking questions is risky and can be interpreted negatively instead of positively. When those in power are convinced that questioning and exploring the situation is a sign of incompetence, then attempts at dialogue and honest questioning become a blind alley. You can even end up losing your job. In an atmosphere were we do not know when, how, by whom and on which standards we are judged, we will feel insecure and not free for shared reflection.

In the organisation the time for reflection may be a team-meeting, a staff consultation, or some other conference about (with!) the client and about working together in the team as life-space-workers. In many centres for day and residential care we will find a variety of such meetings. Who participates depends on the goal of the meeting. A distinction can be made between meetings which have to do with —

- the behaviour, the development, the care-plan of the individual resident;
- co-operation within the team;
- policy within a section (the living group and team)
- information about the organisation as a whole;
- decision making about the policy of the organisation;
- training and professional development of staff, including support, guidance, supervision.

The policy of the organisation has its influence on the policy-making in the various teams or units. Conversely, the activity within the team can have a great impact on the organisation at large. All practice within the organisation and influence on the policy of the decision-makers has to be based on accurate knowledge of the functioning of the various sections and staff, as well as the different meetings and their interconnection. Insight into the flow (or the stagnation?) of information is important if we are to understand (and more so to change) the actual conditions of the organisation. Change requires good leadership, good teamwork and good reflection. ■

"He claims to be very democratic, but believe me, he runs a heck of a tight ship."
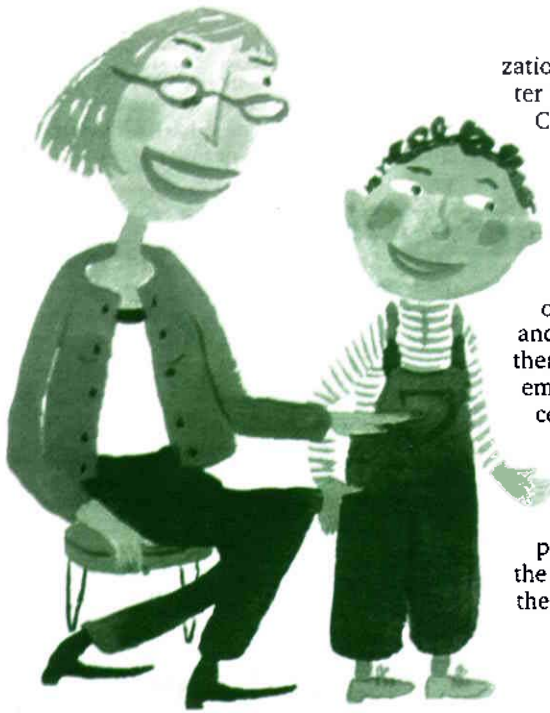
THE POWER OF PEERS

It's a world out of a fanciful children's book: a place where parents and teachers don't matter, where the company of other kids is most meaningful, where nothing much would change if we left children in their homes and schools 'but switched all the parents around.' That doesn't describe an imagined never-never land, however, but the environment that every one of us grows up in, contends Judith Rich Harris. The maverick writer and theoretician believes that peers, not parents, determine our personalities, and her unorthodox views have made the very real world of psychology sit up and take notice.

Harris, who is unaffiliated with any university or institution, laid out her radical theory in a 1995 *Psychological Review* paper, which was later cited as one of the year's outstanding articles by the American Psychological Association. Like behavioural geneticists, Harris believes that heredity is a force to be reckoned with. But she sees another powerful force at work: group sociali-

zation, or the shaping of one's character by one's peers.

Central to this theory is the idea that behaviour is 'context-specific': we act in specific ways in specific circumstances. 'Children today live in two different worlds: home and the world outside the home.' says Harris. 'There is little overlap between these two worlds, and the rules for how to behave in them are quite different.' Displays of emotion, for example, are often accepted by parents but discouraged by teachers or friends. Rewards and punishments are different too. At home, children may be scolded for their failures and praised for their successes; outside the home, they may be ridiculed when they make a mistake or ignored when they behave appropriately.

Preferring peers

As children grow older and peer influence grows stronger, says Harris, they come to prefer the ways of peers over those of their parents. She likes to use language as an example: the children of immigrants, she notes, will readily learn to speak the language of the new country without an accent.

They may continue to speak in their parents' tongue when at home, but over time the language of their peers will become their 'native' language. Adopting the ways of their contemporaries makes sense, says Harris, because children will live among peers, and not among older adults, for the greater part of their lives. 'Parents are past, peers are future,' she says. It's evolutionarily adaptive, too. 'Humans were designed to live not in nuclear families, but in larger groups,' observes Harris. 'The individuals who became our ancestors succeeded partly because they had the ability to get along with the other members.' The group continues to influence us in a number of ways: we identify ourselves with it, and change our behaviour to conform to its norms. We define our group by contrasting it with other groups, and seek to distinguish our group by our actions and appearance. Within the group, we compare ourselves to others and jockey for higher status. We may receive labels from our peers, and strive to live up (or down) to them. Finally, we may be most lastingly affected by peers by

being rejected by them. People who were rejected as children often report - long term self-esteem problems, poor social skills, and increased rates of psychopathology.

Parents don't matter?

Our personalities become less flexible as we grow older, says Harris, so that 'the language and personality acquired in childhood and adolescent peer groups persist, with little modification, for the remainder of the life span.' It's a startling conclusion, but Harris claims that her greatest challenge lies not in persuading people that peers matter, but in convincing them that parents don't. She calls the belief in parents' enduring importance 'the nurture assumption,' and her forthcoming book by that title will argue that it's simply a myth of modern culture. She doesn't deny that children need the care and protection of parents, and acknowledges that mothers and fathers can influence things like religious affiliation and choice of career. But, she maintains, 'parental behaviours have no effect on the psychological characteristics their children will have as adults.'

In fact, she says, 'probably the most important way that parents can influence their children is by determining who their peers are. The immigrants who move their children to another country have provided them with a completely different set of peers. But a less dramatic shift — simply deciding which neighbourhood to live in — can also make a difference.' From one area to another, she notes, there are substantial variations in the rates of delinquency, truancy, and teen pregnancy — problems parents can try to avoid by surrounding their offspring with suitable friends. Beyond that, however, children will make their own choices. 'It's pretty easy to control the social life of a three-year-old.' says Harris. 'But once the kids are past age 10 or 12, all bets are off.'

Annie Murphy Paul in *Psychology Today*