

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

Child & Youth Care

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GUEST VIEWPOINT

Employment Act: Serious risk factors

Some space is given in this issue of the journal to the Basic Conditions of Employment Act, and we have read various opinions of the Act in these columns over the past few months. There are two worrying aspects which I have not seen mentioned elsewhere.

Already law

While we in the child and youth care system are waiting for something to happen, waiting for someone to hear our point of view, this Act is already law and we are already subject to it. Very few private sector institutions will have been able by now to comply with this law, since few can afford it. This means that, in the mean time, we are breaking the law.

A legal opinion was published in *Child & Youth Care* in 1998 to the effect that the authorities are unlikely to prosecute institutions at this stage, and that may be true. But all institutions are nonetheless vulnerable, now, to a legal action by, for example, a disgruntled employee. Such an employee would have the law on his or her side, and institutions should be aware of their exposure in this regard.

"The law is an ass"

But there is a far worse situation

brought about by this legislation. Because it is almost impossible for struggling charities caring for troubled children in residential settings to comply with this Act, they find themselves caught unwillingly in a dilemma: to break the law or close their doors. Like Charles Dickens, who suffered as a youngster from the imprisonment for debt of his father who had fallen upon hard times, we can recognise a bad law, the law which is an ass.

Most of the non-government child care work in South Africa is still done by the various religious communities. An Act of Parliament which would force them into the conflict of either breaking the law or stopping their good work is not a good Act.

At a time in South Africa when we are all concerned about crime and lawlessness, we do not need the law itself to be defied or undermined. We in child and youth care work are committed to bringing children up with respect for the laws and morality of our people and our country.

Finding each other

It is not acceptable that we should break the law. It is not acceptable that we should be set up to break the law. It is not acceptable that we should unnecessarily be made vulnerable to the law.

It is not acceptable that the state departments (on whose behalf we do this work with children in difficulties) should not share this dilemma with us and agree to seek with us a common mind on a principle which we all, in any case, agree. Let's listen to each other.

FROM THE EDITOR

Something different

A change, so we are told, is as good as a rest. And variety is the spice of life. With this volume of *Child & Youth Care* — our seventeenth! — we introduce a slight change in style. The cover has a new mast-head and a simpler look, the body text typeface is cleaner (half a point bigger, but a condensed face which gives us more miles per gallon of ink) and the contents also have a new feel.

And who said that quality must necessarily decline in these days of diminishing resources and standards? For the technically minded, we are for the first time using proper repro positives for the journal, which will give us better print reproduction than before — thanks to Brian Fairbanks of Fairstep Bureau in Cape Town, who generously agreed to donate the image-setting and positives for this. Thank you Brian.

An appreciative subscriber recently described this journal as "a good cover-to-cover read". We have a small Editorial Board which tries to achieve this each month, and we hope that this issue will satisfy your expectations — or that you will let us know!

"Words, words, words, I'm so sick of words"

Ultimately, there is only value in all these pages and words if they are somehow translated into good practice. One task we should all tackle in 1999 is to get past all those "in" words which I fear often hide the fact that our practice is not always up to much. If I may risk a personal view, I am tired of all the "getting policies in place so that legitimate intersectoral structures can be put in place by all stakeholders to assess contextually relevant need areas so that appropriate programmes can be put on the table to formulate plans, goals and objectives for the implementation of service delivery on the ground by roleplayers on a sustainable basis to effectively address problems which have been identified blah blah blah ..." when at the end of the day troubled children and families are left unhelped.

What would interest me far more would be just one of your success stories from which the rest of us could learn — just one practice experience which helped a hurt youngster to feel better or a struggling parent to try harder.

At the official, policymaking and legislative — even theoretical — levels of child care we never hear words like hurt, comfort, love and encouragement, nor even words like breakfast, school clothes, friends and fun.

Today, of course, you will use and hear words like policy and developmental and resources, but (see front cover) this is a journal for those who work with kids. Let's keep our daily work, our encounters with people, our ways of helping children and families to manage better — our practice — more central in the pages and words of our journal this year. And may your year be a good one.



Child & Youth Care

A journal for those who work with troubled children and youth at risk

Volume 17 Number 1 January 1999



Is there life after child care? **Vivien Harber** talks about leaving — **PAGE 8**



Sharing funny stories of the past — a way of **engaging kids** in our programmes — **PAGE 7**



Some new ideas in work with street children in a two-part feature by **Father Patrick Shanahan** of Accra — **PAGE 4**

UNICEF'S **Carol Bellamy** reports on the world's children — **PAGE 12**



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CHILD CARE WORKERS
National Executive Committee

Chairman

Ashley Theron BA (SW), BA (Hons), NHCRC, MICC
P.O. Box 495, Mafikeng 2745, Phone 0140-87-5282/3
Fax 0140-87-5273 ashley_theron@nwpg.org.za

Treasurer

Roger Pitt, Dip.Th. P.O. Box 482, King Williams Town 5600.
Tel: (0433) 21932 Fax (0433) 22252 e-mail: naccwkt@iafrica.com

Members

Linda de Villiers (Border); Marie Waspe (Gauteng); Garth Ownhouse (Eastern Cape); Himla Makan (KwaZulu Natal); Kathy Scott (Western Cape)

Professional Staff

Director

Merle Allsopp BA, HDE, NHCRC, P.O. Box 36407
Glossdery 7702 Tel: (021) 696-4247/697-4123
Fax: (021) 697-4130 e-mail: naccwct@iafrica.com

Deputy Director

Zeni Thumbadoo P.O. Box 18295, Dalbridge 4014
Tel. 031-25-3775 e-mail: naccwdb@iafrica.com

Publications

Brian Gannon BA(Hons), MA Box 23199, Claremont 7735
Tel 021-788-3610. Fax 788-9423 e-mail: pretext@iafrica.com

Liaison

Sibongile Manyathi B.Soc.Sc. (Hons) P.O. Box 18295
Dalbridge 4014 Tel 031-25-3775 Fax 25-3369 e-mail: naccwdb@iafrica.com

Consultant

Jackie Winfield B.Soc.Sc. NHCRC, P.O. Box 18295
Dalbridge 4014 Tel 031-25-3775 Fax 25-3369
e-mail: naccwdb@iafrica.com

OPINION	2
STREET CHILDREN	4
PRACTICE THEME FOR 1999	7
INTERVIEW: VIVIEN HARBER	8
AFRICA NETWORK	10
NEWS	11, 12
FEATURE: TOMORROW'S CHILDREN	13
LETTERS	16
FEATURE: SIDE EFFECTS OF ECSTASY	17
THE ASSOCIATION	19

Transvaal Barbara Engelbrecht P.O. Box 74387 Turffontein 2140. Cell 082-930-8503

KwaZulu/Natal Laila Ramarayan Aryan Benevolent Home
Tel. 031-432-388/9

Border Contact Linda de Villiers P.O. Box 482, King Williams Town 5600. Tel: 0433-21932

Western Cape Sandra Oosthuisen 61 Lochner St, Strand 7140
Tel: 021-854-8723

Eastern Cape Cecil Wood, 76 Circular Drive Charlo 6070. Tel. 041-32-2329 e-mail: naccwpe@iafrica.com

Suid-Kaap Harold Malgas, Private Bag X6587, George 6530.
Tel (044) 875-0402

Namaqualand Father Anthony Cloete RC Sending Kinderhuis Kamieskroon 8241. (0257) 608

Kimberley Derek Swartz. Private Bag X5005, Kimberley 8300
Tel. (0531) 73-2321

NACCW

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All those "millennium babies" due to be born this year — where are they heading? — **Page 13**



Eight children from from Cambodia, Guatemala, India, the Philippines, and Zambia get to speak at a UNICEF conference — **Page 10**

... and I have a few words to say on **Page 20**



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The International Child and Youth Care Network
www.pretext.co.za/cyc-net cyc-net@iafrica.com
Publisher of electronic journal **CYC-ONLINE**
www.pretext.co.za/cyc-net/cyconline

We print here in two parts a paper presented by **Fr Patrick Shanahan** at a recent seminar on children at the University of Zimbabwe

THE ALTERNATIVE AFRICA: STREET CHILDREN IN GHANA

"You don't know much and that's a fact."
— *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll

Kwame's story

Let me put a face on the Alternative Africa. His real name is not Kwame, but he is a real child. His story shows how a child in a village can finish up on the streets of Accra. His village is about 70 kms north of the capital. He was in Junior High School, Class 1. He was 14 years old. He knew that his father, who had no real farm of his own and who worked for a big cocoa farmer whenever there was work available, was in severe trouble in paying school fees. Three times Kwame had taken home a note from the headmaster. He knew what was in the note. In Ghana if you don't pay you are excluded from school. He knew that there would be no fourth note. He knew that the following Friday he would be told "Stay at home". He spoke to some schoolmates. He borrowed some money and at 4 o'clock on the Thursday morning of that week he walked the eight miles to the bigger village which had a lorry station, bound

A shoe-shine group in the streets of Accra helps youngsters to make some money and be independent.



eventually for Accra. He arrived in Accra on the Thursday night — alone, tired, utterly confused. He was still a village boy. He slept in the lorry park on the north side of Accra that night and in the morning he looked around for anyone who might speak his language or come from his district. Within the first week he discovered that the streets are rough. He was beaten by other street boys, by city guards and by police. By the end of the first week he had found three other boys from his area, just a little older, and he joined them and 200 others in their street dormitory area. This is an open courtyard, and is what can best be described by those who know Charles Dickens as a Fagin's kitchen.

His first job didn't come for ten days and, on the street with so little money around, solidarity in caste terms is something of a dream world created by novelists and film makers when they confront the problem of street children. Kwame was in reality alone, hungry, and still a village boy. He got a job as a refuse carrier in the markets, which meant that he worked at 3 o'clock in the morning, at 11 o'clock in the morning, and at 6 o'clock in the evening, but he started to earn some cash. He also started to learn that on the street you hit first and talk afterwards. He discovered the power of a gang (called a "base" in Accra). He became sexually active. He tried marijuana but didn't like it, so he settled for the odd snatch at the local hard liquor. Within a month he was angling to become a shoe shine boy. He was by then a street boy. The village had gone. He had joined the Alternative Africa. He was, and is, a person of the new subculture, of the new ethnicity.

Today Kwame is a shoe shine boy. He thinks seriously from time to time of getting an apprenticeship, but now as a shoe shine boy he earns enough to eat well on the street, to be a minder of a girl two years younger than him (he is now sixteen). He is our friend and we, at CAS, hope that we reciprocate that. He is a new African.

I am aware that such a label may seem to fall into the trap that Judith Ennew warns us about in her article in *Africa Insight*.

(1996, Volume 26, No 3, page 204). She says "it is difficult to see what, apart from geography, makes a Cairo shoe shine boy, a 10-year old domestic servant in Lagos, an Afrikaans schoolboy and an Ethiopian youngster herding camels, fall under the same rubric of The African Child."

We would have to agree, given such a group. But the rubric of new African in my terms comes from the streets, from the cities. It comes from *urban*, and I think all over our continent today we have the absolute need to be aware of what the urban world can do to our children.

Street children are here on our streets. They have rights and needs. We have to be open-minded and flexible in our dealings and alliances with them. In the words of the late Fr Arnold Grol, writing in 1983 about street children in Nairobi, we have to show them "affection, care, service and love". It is only in that way, says Grol, "that you can start having a real human and brotherly relationship with them. Without respect and affection you cannot have a lasting influence on these children." I think it is there that we would concur fully with Ennew in recognising that children are individuals.

Fifteen years on from the article which acted as an apologia by Arnold Grol, Catholic Action for Street Children (CAS) in Accra tries to react in the same way. Its partner organisation, Street Girls Aid (SAID) does the same but with particular reference to the girl child who is in serious trouble on the streets. CAS and SAID, started in 1993 and 1994 respectively, are two local NCOs working on the streets with street children. I will return to these two programmes in the part of this paper which deals with the evaluation of policies employed by government and non-government agencies in Accra.

Life on the Streets

Criticism, like charity, begins at home. To me and to many of you present at

this seminar I have to say that as social scientists in Africa we have been, and still are, exceedingly slow at acknowledging that street children are here. Surely we have to admit that this is not a very happy situation. The children are not going anywhere, least of all away. They have come to stay.

When I was a young priest in northern Ghana I had to learn local languages and customs and I was told for the first year of my work to look and listen and learn, but not to speak. And yet as social scientists we do not want to look or listen or learn and we are very quick to talk about street children. They are a new culture. Some say "subculture". I used that phrase myself initially. Now I say they are part of the new Africa, the Alternative Africa. If "culture" upsets you, then they are part of the new ethnicity, but again it is no use as social scientists to seethe impotently about "terrible" situations on the streets. We need to look for resolutions to some of the problems.

Poverty

Let us examine two factors that go into the make up of Kwame. Our children are arriving on our city streets because of a combination of poverty and the breakdown of traditional family structures. My colleague in Accra maintains that the main reason for children arriving on the streets is the breakdown of the family structure. However, I see the sheer poverty of their situation as the prime cause. Our urbanisation levels in Africa ensure that rural poverty is transferred to our streets with mind-numbing regularity and rapidity.

Secondly, we need to ask: "Who are these Kwames?" We all know the classic divisions of children "on the street" and children "of the street". I have no wish to get embroiled in academic arguments of whether or not our approach to our children has been dominated by Latin American models. I prefer to leave that to senior academics like Ennew, Riugini, Ebin and Diaw. I have to say that I have never felt threatened or dominated by any of the Latin American thinking about children on the streets. I find, for example, that people mis-use Paulo Freire and fail to see that he was one of the first to accept participatory development from children as well as adults. In Accra, we would have to say that 50% of all street children in the city actually live, sleep and conduct their social life on the streets. As social scientists we must be wary of thinking that just because a child goes back to a recognised domicile at night he or she is not a real street child. That is a very dangerous attitude to take. When you are on the street you are a different person.

It is to Madeleine Dunford, writing in 1996 about street children in Kenya, that I am indebted for the creation of a third way of looking at the problem. She calls this new, more shadowy, group children "for" the street (Oc-

casional Papers, No.58, "Tackling the Symptoms or the Causes", Centre of African Studies, Edinburgh University). What does she mean by that? I think an example from one of the slums I have worked in for the last 10 years will help. In East Mamobi, in Accra, in the lane where I helped start a maternity clinic and where now we have a Refuge for street girls, I counted 43 children of early primary school age in September 1997. None of them, as far as I could see, moved very far from their own tiny area in that particular slum. None of them goes to school. All are illiterate. All need to be fed. They are all ready "for" the street. Their parents and guardians will have no option but to let them go on the streets, either willingly or unwillingly, in order to hustle for their own daily subsistence. This third category is perhaps the most worrying.

The street

There is at this point the need to address one of the real players in the child's life on the streets, and that is the street itself. Even experienced commentators like Fabio Dallape have in my opinion failed to take on board the fact that the street is a living entity. He says: "The term 'street children' is inappropriate, offensive and gives a distorted message." ("Urban Children: A Challenge and an Opportunity", *Childhood*, Vol 3, no.2, 1996). Authors are very quick today to toss out expressions like "streetism" which is as inaccurate as it is ugly-sounding. We have to give to the streets, the street corners and the shanty groupings the same significance, importance and recognition that we give to paths, lanes, tracks, hamlets, dwellings and villages when we approach rural appraisal and learning about things rural in Africa. I tell my workers that street mapping is a very important exercise, that the whole social relationship on the streets is vital to the life of the children who are working and living there. Whether we like it or not, whether we want to use the word "street", whether we feel it is an insult, it is where these children are.

May I be forgiven for poking just a little fun — a little serious fun — at the Junior Mayor of Bloemfontein! In 1997 all he could talk about was that he did not like the name "street children" and that people in Africa wanted to call them "community kids". Delappe himself talks of the need for workers to study the community first. Neither of them tells us what they mean by community, and neither of them accepts the major role that the street and its whole social implication has for each child. I think downtown urban anywhere in the world has mighty important things to tell us. I think we dismiss "street" too easily — in my case in Ghana — for our own good. At present, I deliberately use the expression "street children" because I wish to accord great respect to the importance it holds in their young lives. For half the children I live among, street is

home. I have no wish to trap them, as Christina Stanton Blanc says, "by labelling, stigmatisation, and victimisation" (*Childhood*, op.cit.). Perhaps I could steal a line from the title of one of her publications of 1994, *Urban Children in Distress* (Reading: Cordon and Breech). Could I say "urban children in distress on the streets" and wonder if some of the commentators on Africa would come along with me! If we give these children credence and rights then the streets will be taken as "their place"

A day in the life ...

The danger for all of us working with street children is to forget what life is like on the streets. I would like to describe a day in the life of a boy, so let's go back to Kwame. For the purposes of the description, let's make it a day in the dry season. I say that because in the rainy season you will come across a phenomenon that still makes me pause in anger. It is the picture of what I call the human horses. Very often children in the rains seek whatever little shelter there is and stand up, huddling close to each other. They then fall asleep, like horses.

But let's look at a dry season situation. Kwame, you will remember, has become a full member of the Alternative Africa. At 16 years old and a shoe shine boy he is already a leader on his own particular street corner. He still sleeps in that open courtyard. His first problem when he sleeps is what to do with the money he has earned. His second problem is what to do with his shoe shine box. Recently Kwame switched from saving his money with local money savers to putting it into the safe-keeping of the housemother of the Refuge for street children which CAS runs. His shoe shine box is more important, so at night the boxes are placed under the protection of the street boy who is the night watchman for that particular corner. This night watchman is paid by the street boys to make sure that other street boys do not come to steal from them when they are asleep. The box is the symbol of his job. It has a handle and a piece of rope to enable him to throw it over his shoulder. It contains his brushes, his cloth, his polish and, because every shoe shine boy is a cobbler in embryo, it contains hammers, nails, patches, spare heels, bits of rubber, glue and everything else to enable Kwame to mend your shoe or sandal where you stand on the street. It is his most precious possession and if you touch a shoe shine boy's shoe box you will find the retribution to be swift, violent and very messy.

Kwame will get up at daylight. He will need to pay for water to wash and he will need to pay the same price again for the dubious privilege of using a pit latrine for his toilet needs. By 6.30 am Kwame will be looking for the women who sell food on the streets. If he has kept enough money from the day before he

will buy some rice water or some local porridge and a piece of bread, and then he will join the crowds as they begin to move around the city. The first thing to remember about shoe shine boys is that they walk enormous distances every day because everyone they pass is a potential customer. The second thing is that they all have their own areas to work in. Some of the worst fights have seen were between shoe shine boys who crossed over into somebody else's territory. By midday in the dry season it is beginning to get not just very hot but, because of the west coast, equally humid. Kwame will normally eat in places he has used before. Street children eat very well in terms of quantity. Like most poor people in the world they spend 70% of their income on food. The problem of eating on the street is with the hygiene and cleanliness of utensils, the servers and the cooks. At some point in the day he will surely find some shade to collapse in. (Many of them have started to use the CAS Refuge in order to flop out) By late afternoon, when the city turns itself around, they will be back in the crowds looking for customers. As far as I know, Kwame has two girlfriends. As far as I know, he has not fathered any children yet, nor to the best of my knowledge has he suffered from a severe bout of venereal disease. He is lucky. Kwame will go to see one of his girlfriends. He will also meet the other shoe shine boys in his gang. He will have earned, if it has been a good day, £1.50 sterling. If it has been a bad day he will be hungry. He will give some money to whichever girlfriend he meets. If he is not too tired he may go to one of the ramshackle video viewing places. He doesn't smoke much marijuana even though it is quite cheap, and he can't afford to go to the cheap disco joints that are beginning to mushroom. The chances are that Kwame will be fast asleep by 10 o'clock, having first paid the watchman, spent some more money to wash and checked that his box is safe.

Comfort

Let me tell you the story of a girl child called Comfort, though her real name is not, of course, Comfort. When our workers found her in 1997 she was 13 years old, anaemic and seven months' pregnant. They found her sleeping on a rubbish heap behind one of the markets in central Accra. Like many of the 20,000 children, including 6,000 girls, living on the streets of Ghana's capital, Comfort had come to the city from a village to earn some money and survive. She started work doing one of the lowest jobs, selling polythene bags of iced water in the markets during the day. At night, like so many other girls on

the street, she acquired a minder — a young man. She gave sex for security and some extra money. He made sure that she understood she was his property. A year later she was pregnant. Her minder had gone. A week after the social workers found her she went into labour on the rubbish tip and by chance an older woman saw another social worker, raised the alarm, and Comfort was able to have her baby safely in a clinic next to the Refuge of Street Girls Aid. She was very lucky. Her baby is truly beautiful. Today Comfort is back on the street with her baby, trying hard to survive. It is clear that for an unskilled, uneducated child-mother she faces a very tough way ahead.

All street children are vulnerable. Girls on the street are more vulnerable than the boys. The most vulnerable girls are those who are pregnant. And the most vulnerable children of all are the street babies. Comfort is of course somebody's daughter. She could be anybody's daughter. Comfort could be your daughter.

A year ago we asked 80 girl mothers like Comfort what they wanted for their children. They all said two things: (1) "Not to be like us living on the streets or in the shanties" and (2) to receive a proper schooling and education. There isn't much hope for Comfort to have a better life. Comfort, though, has hope that her baby will have a life very different to hers.

Whose responsibility is it to help Comfort get what she wants for her baby? Could it be that as social scientists we also have to be *agents provocateurs* with governments, NGOs and multi-national development agencies?

Fact FILE

Catholic Action For Street Children (CAS) Accra, Ghana

Catholic Action for Street Children is a Ghanaian NGO which helps street children, living in the streets of Accra. CAS runs a House of Refuge in Jamestown, Accra.

In the Day-Refuge street boys and girls can play games and rest, receive medical treatment, wash and keep safe their money and belongings. Very importantly, the Refuge is also a place where they can receive advice about their life and future. CAS runs several programs. Children can receive literacy education and learn different trades in the demonstration classes. CAS can also help a child to really move off the street and learn a trade or go to school.

Every day some of the CAS staff do 'field work', visiting the streets to be with the children and to know where they work and sleep. At several places in town 'Mini-Refuges' have been established. At these small contact places children can meet the field workers. In this way more children can benefit from CAS' work.

"It is only with affection and care that you can have a human and brotherly relationship — and thus influence these children."

Street girls

CAS works close together with another NGO, Street girls AID (S.AID), which runs a Refuge in Mamobi, Accra, for street girls who are pregnant. Before and after the delivery the girls can stay in the S.AID's Refuge. They get medical care as well as advice about how to take care of themselves and their baby.

At the biggest market of Accra, CAS has built three crèches (Baby Care Program). S.AID runs the crèches, where babies and young children are cared for, while their mothers are working for their daily living.

Mini-Refuges

In town two meeting points have been established, called Mini-Refuges. These kiosks are put up in selected areas where many street children are known to operate. The children who cannot come to the main Refuge, because of the distance or lack of time, can visit the Mini-Refuges. They can relax there for some time and interact with the staff. Every day fifteen to twenty children visit a Mini-Refuge. The goal of the Mini-Refuges is to create more opportunities for street children to receive counseling and advice. Literacy classes also take place at these meeting points. CAS hopes to build a few more Mini-Refuges in order to reach as many street children as possible.

One of the "Mini-Refuge" kiosks which serve as meeting points for street children.



PRACTICE THEME FOR 1999

Problems with engaging



The NACCW and this journal have proposed that we focus again on a "practice theme" for the year, and for 1999 we have suggested the theme "engaging" — that is, getting in touch with kids, promoting attachment, doing stuff together, being actively available and being positive role models ... All child and youth care people are invited to participate.

This month a reader writes: I read in the November issue about the "engagement" theme suggested for 1999. I have some problems engaging with children. I try to talk to them but they're usually in a hurry to get somewhere, or they avoid me because they think I am going to scold them or make them do something. Also, many of our kids are shy and unconfident and they look down when I look at them and talk to them, so the contact becomes embarrassing. Or they have very little to say and our "conversation" consists of me asking questions and getting one-word answers.

1. You have observed and described your own behaviour and circumstances well. It is good that you are able to reflect on your own practice and the difficulties you experience.

2. Yes, youngsters would prefer to get off somewhere than to stop and talk. As you say, often they don't talk well and probably have difficult stuff to talk about — or *not* talk about. But between you and your staff colleagues, try to plan to *BE THE PLACE* the kids want to get to. You've got no programme if the adults and kids are avoiding each other all the time. If the adults are going to be in any way effective, there must be activities, groups, games, rites and rituals, tasks, meetings, classes, walks, meals — whatever — that you do together with the children. When you do these things together with them — play, learn, build, celebrate, clean, eat — you will naturally find yourselves talking and sharing ... engaging.

3. Why do you feel that the kids expect you to scold them or make them do something? Are you only showing them these aspects of your role? Does your programme limit you to these levels of contact?

As child care workers, our ability to engage with young people is often affected by the roles we play. We can find ourselves in roles such as teacher-pupil, professional-client, adult-child, custodian-detainee but at the heart of our work, always, is the necessity for us to build person-to-person relationships.

4. Yes, at risk youngsters *are* often socially awkward and verbally reserved — and especially with people who are not familiar of culturally similar. But they learn to talk by talking, and they learn to relate by relating. When a young person has spent ten minutes talking with you about something he or she is interested in (a movie, a sports star, how to play a game, fix a bike or paint a picture) they experience success in person-to-person interactions and are less likely to be so awkward next time. Most kids come to you basically because they are not coping — they are retiring, clumsy, inept and unconfident — and your main job is to create periods when they *can* be capable, confident and successful.

5. Something to try: with kids you are just getting to know (or to engage) try *not* to position yourself face-to-face with them. Face-to-face can be intimidating (for both of you) and it stops you both from moving. Rather turn and face the way they are facing — accompany them, don't confront them. This way you can look at something together, walk together, talk together ...

Our practice theme for 1999: All readers are encouraged to try some of these ideas to improve your engaging skills. Keep observing your own practice. Check back and see what worked for you and what is still difficult. And please write in to share your ideas and questions about engaging with kids.

ENGAGING

Engage by including

One-on-one engaging is a vital skill for all child care workers to learn — but groups can also contribute to engaging.

When we make individual youngsters feel 'at home' by filling them in on the history and special culture of our organisation, they can more easily identify with the place — and therefore trust it and use it better.

Remember when ...?

Every place has its funny stories, its favourite sayings, its heroes and villains. The residents enjoy "remember when" sessions when these "inside stories" are told — and usually remembered with good humour and fun.



More important, though, when we share our history, newcomers get to share the traditions of the place, they get to understand the unique language and the secret meanings which often characterises a programme.

The "we" word

You and I have the capacity to influence people when they identify with us — that is, when the individual "me" and "you" in the relationship become "we".

We want to get to that point with our organisation, too.

When youngsters in our programme are using the word "we", they are not only feeling at home; they are also beginning to trust the values and goals of the place — and to feel part of it.

IS THERE LIFE AFTER CHILD CARE?

The Art of Leaving

We talk to **Vivien Harber** (Lewis) who was principal of St Michael's Children's Home for nine years.

What brought you into child care?

I worked for many years at a private preparatory school which took in boarders. Inevitably this had me interested in work with children living away from home, and raised questions like what did this mean for them? And what did it mean for their parents and families?

I came into contact with children's homes from time to time when we needed help in thinking through our work with particularly troubled pupils.

In 1980 I went to St Michael's as principal – and in rather a different role since my work was not intended to be directly with the children. It was, rather, to work with the staff team, developing and implementing ways of helping children who had had bad experiences of life and bad experiences of adults.

We worked, living as a group of adults and children in community, at healing the hurt and harm which many of these kids had suffered, and getting them "up and running" again. I soon became conscious of the fact that we needed *enough* adults, and adults of *different kinds*, to achieve this – not just "housemother" figures, but people of various ages and skills and viewpoints who could be bridging role-models useful for the kids.

In the end we had no single programme, but a cluster of programmes – both on and off the campus, for both the children and their families, some general and some very focussed – which tried to offer what was needed by each person.

When the time came for you to leave, how did you manage?

"Manage" is probably a good word, because leaving a resident community is always complex and has to be done very thoughtfully.

One will have built up a commitment to a wide group of people – children, parents, one's employers, the local community, schools – and cannot simply "walk out". Leaving was a long time coming for me. I had originally said that I would stay for six years, and stayed for nine. Much of my leaving was wrapped up in my vocation to the priesthood, and since at the time this was not yet possible for a woman, the future was not clear.

As it happened, when I did leave, it was not directly to take up another post and some children struggled to understand that. But in any event, at my age I was reluctant to become over-identified with a particular job or place, and I didn't want to lose the sense of my own journey through life.

There were no easy guidelines. One colleague had warned me that I would never really feel that I was in child care until children I had admitted started leaving, having completed their cycle as it were. Another had said that when you feel you are repeating the same things and getting on to a plateau, it was time to move on.

It seems one should think of leaving well in advance?

There are a number of things which, in retrospect, were important. I don't know how conscious I was of all of these at the time. One was having a good supervisor who kept me critical, with a good sense of where I was and what I was doing. The kinds of relationships I developed, both inside and outside the job, needed understanding and monitoring. For example, I had decided that as principal I should devote most of my time to the *adults* (whether staff members or parents or teachers or others) who worked directly with the children – and not ordinarily to work directly with the children myself. This did not spare me the responsibility or the angst which goes with this work, but it gave me the distance and the longer view through which I could empower and support people.



"Another benefit of good supervision was avoiding the common problem of being eaten alive, consumed by a job or a group of people or a place, so that when you go you leave as a husk."

It was rather like a grandparent role – where one might have to hold the distressed baby for a while but then could hand it back to the mother!

One's relationships on the job tended therefore to be more professional and structured.

Another benefit of good supervision was avoiding the common problem of being eaten alive, consumed by a job or a group of people or a place, so that when you go you leave as a husk. I have been good at making my own space and my own life independent of the job. I know when I want to see a movie, go camping or visit friends. This "going out for refreshment" is certainly a case of looking after oneself, but it is no less a case of enriching and stimulating the community you live with. When you don't do it you can become limited and boring to others, and you can also become impoverished and greatly at risk in your own life.

Of course, at the time I also had a teen-aged daughter for whom, appropriately, I had to be a mother. It would have been tough on her if I had allowed myself to be "owned" by someone else, and I was helped by having these roles as person, mother and principal, clearly defined.

In leaving, did you ever have the feeling that you were abandoning people?

I took a whole year to disengage. I dislike the work "terminate" because I was moving on to a different relationship with all those people – as indeed we all do, even with members of our own families, year by year. All relationships go through cycles, through growth periods, through consolidations and changes. Even for troubled children, one can make leaving and change positive and forward-looking experiences. Relationships, and the work we do, survive moves and changes.

Vivien Harber: Leaving child care

I remember being most conscious of this while standing in the ruins of Ephesus. Here had been a vibrant city, of government, commerce and education — with town centres and streets and families and people and relationships — but now it was empty and silent. What had been important and great in its day were the opportunities to build and test out one's philosophy about people, and to live according to what one believed — and that was what we were doing in child care: it was not *the place* but *the people*, and this would continue ...

So, eventually in 1989 you left child care?

Yes and no. I left my full-time principal's job in a children's home, but I was to do a number of jobs in the next decade, some directly in the field of child care, others not, but I'm not sure that one ever leaves child care: it goes with you everywhere. I had no job to go to at the time, but I had the use of a house and UIF for a few months. Soon I was asked to evaluate the programme at Cowley House, run by the Western Province Council of Churches and the Dependants Conference, offering hospitality to people coming to Cape Town to visit family members on Robben Island. My experience and an independent view about running a programme for people was no doubt of some help, but I learned so much more from the people there. I saw how their words, their listening and their support helped others, usually complete strangers, through the pain of visiting those in prison.

In August of 1989 I entered a training programme with others testing their vocation to the priesthood, and at the same time the NACCW wanted some help over their conference period. The following year these two interests were formalised: I was appointed part-time Regional Director in the Western Cape for the NACCW, and began three years at UCT to study for the priesthood.

When I was made a deacon and then a priest in 1994, Archbishop Tutu encouraged me to continue my involvement in

work with children and young people. From the St George's Cathedral Foundation I was part of a team involved in the outreach ministry of the Cathedral. I spent a time exploring a possible respite care programme for HIV/AIDS children, and although this never came to anything, it was a learning curve for me and I became involved with a number of national and international AIDS agencies.

I had been involved in the teaching of the NACCW's HIV/AIDS course, and following on the establishment of the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Young People at Risk in 1995, I was invited by Merle Allsopp to accept a one-year contract in the "Project Upgrade" training for staff in state institutions. This had me travelling to Pretoria, Bloemfontein, the Northern Cape and the Eastern Cape — and to many institutions in the Western Cape. The programme consisted of a number of short courses, and going back several times to often remote places I got to know a number of people well and what they and their institutions were struggling with. Later I served on the Cabinet enquiry into state institutions.

As you have moved into a more orthodox ministry, what have you taken with you from child care?

I am daily asking myself whether I am a priest who is a child care worker — or a child care worker who is a priest. Child care taught me to seek the practical implications of any idea. In the academic world where we talked a lot of theory, I always needed to "earth" my thinking in the real world. I remember when we were studying what is called "situation ethics" the situations presented were always so theoretical and contrived. I said: "What about a struggling family with three children and one small car, it's 7.20 at the breakfast table, dad has a meeting at 8.00 and mother has to drop everyone on the way to her own work — and the middle child bursts into tears and says 'I'm not going to school today.' Now let's talk situation ethics!"

These were real situations in child care every day. And if we child care workers



Vivien Harber. Previous page and below, at services at St George's Cathedral, Cape Town

learned anything it was how to think on our feet, how to apply rules, principles, ideals and values in real time.

We learned to resolve conflicts between others and within ourselves — "What is most important (or most urgent) here?" or "How can I be sensitively tough here?" We learned to find opportunities where others would throw up their hands in defeat — "What are we risking when we go for this gap?" We tried for the greatest good for the greatest number of people — "Who will gain, how much, how necessarily — or who will be placed at risk, how seriously, how avoidably ... ?"

These things never leave you. There isn't a day when I don't refer, with gratitude, to the information, the ideals and the skills of child care work. In short, I may have left the formal child care profession, but I think I'll always be a child care worker — and proud of it.

"I am daily asking myself whether I am a priest who is a child care worker — or a child care worker who is a priest."



Vivien Harber has been part-time Chaplain at St Cyprian's School in Cape Town since 1997. As from the beginning of 1999 she is taking up this position on a full-time basis.



Children's Rights and Wrongs

A pre-millennium evaluation of the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. 5-6 November 1998, Nicosia, Cyprus.

The Centre for World Dialogue presented a two-day conference in co-operation with UNICEF, examining the results of the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the problems that remain a decade after the convention was adopted. The conference addressed the reality of the appalling conditions of millions of children worldwide, exploited in warfare, child slavery, prostitution and child labour. Speakers included fieldworkers, government and NGO representatives, and children with first-hand experience of the issues.



The report on the right is sent to us by a regular reader of this journal, Louis Mwewa, a member of our **Child & Youth Care**

Africa Network. Louis can be contacted on e-mail at chin@zamnet.zm

Zambian children speak at child rights conference

Derek McKee Children in Need Network

Two Zambian children travelled to Cyprus in November to speak at a conference on children's rights at the Center for World Dialogue in Nicosia. The children, Gwen Bridget Mudenda, 12, and Alfred Phiri, 15, spoke on their own experiences as street children and child labourers, and urged the international community to pay attention to children's rights.

The conference was attended by over 500 delegates from all six continents, including Sandra Mason, Chairperson of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child; Marta Santos Pais, Director of Evaluation, Policy and Planning for UNICEF; and His Excellency Glafcos Clerides, President of the Republic of Cyprus. A special message from UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan was presented by Dame Ann Hercus, Chief of the UN Mission to Cyprus.

Eight children

But in addition to these VIPs, eight children attended the conference, from Cambodia, Guatemala, India, the Philippines, and Zambia. Each of the children told his or her tale of abuse or neglect. Ms. Mudenda and Mr. Phiri, the two Zambian children, were the only African children at the conference. Having participated in the Global March Against Child Labour earlier this year, they had plenty of experience in speaking out for children's rights. Ms. Mudenda told the conference about her life as an orphan and a child labourer.

"... the eight children who attended the conference made a huge difference. They created a "free world of their own", working together to overcome language barriers and prejudices.



Her mother died while she was still very young, and she was later forced to sell bananas and secondhand clothes by her stepmother and her aunt. Exploited by her own family, she never had a chance to go to school. Ms. Mudenda appealed on behalf of children's right to education and freedom from hazardous labour. Going even further, she argued that poverty is the underlying cause of exploitation, and she urged the international community to cancel Zambia's debt and the debt of other poor African countries.

Mr. Phiri, whose parents died when he was seven years old, talked about life as an orphan and street child in Zambia. Since he had little family support, Mr. Phiri was forced to work in the street, carrying people's shopping and doing odd jobs. He often slept in the street and sometimes took drugs to dull the pain of his long, hard work. Mr. Phiri echoed Ms. Mudenda's plea for the implementation of child rights, and appealed to the conference for action.

Leaders now

The conference was an important step in raising awareness about the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989 and has since been ratified by 191 countries, including Zambia. The Convention protects basic rights such as the child's right to education and to freedom from abuse and from harmful or exploitative forms of labour. Nevertheless, abuses of children's rights continue all over the world today. The conference on *Children's Rights and Wrongs* helped to clarify the issues, and to show what is being done to implement the Convention, especially in the area of child labour. CHIN Co-ordinator Louis Mwewa, who accompanied Ms. Mudenda and Mr. Phiri on their trip, found that the eight children who attended the conference made a huge difference. They created a "free world of their own", working together to overcome language barriers and prejudices. They performed songs and skits to entertain the adult participants. And with their intelligent speeches they proved that they were capable of standing up for their own rights. According to Mr. Mwewa, they demonstrated that children should not only be seen as future leaders—their leadership should begin now. Fortunately, the needs of the child delegates were recognized by Mr. Hossein Alikhani, President of the Centre for World Dialogue. At the end of the conference Mr. Alikhani personally promised to pay school fees and other educational costs for all eight children until they reach the age of eighteen.

Basic Conditions of Employment Act snags most private children's institutions

The Basic Conditions of Employment Act has exploded on the child and youth care service – primarily affecting private sector organisations – with an almost universally negative impact. This journal polled a number of children's programmes around the country and received a variety of responses.

A number of institutions replied by asking "What Act?" "None of us know anything about this." "We have seen no documentation on this." While it is true that no specific information about new legislation is normally circulated, it is one of the functions of management to be informed about legislation which affects the organisation. Private sector institutions should therefore approach the nearest offices of the Government Printer to ask for a copy of this Act.

Cannot be implemented

Virtually all of the other responses were that it had not been possible to implement the Act. Management and staff teams had discussed the Act and attempted to restructure their staffing and finances to fit in with the requirements, but it was not possible. "We would find it extremely difficult to implement it due to the costs involved." "It is financially impossible in our situation. Our finances don't allow us to employ any more child care workers so they cannot use the shift system expected by the Act." "The Act has incredible financial implications for us and we have held workshops with management and staff without getting around these." "We have tried to organise our shifts this way and that way, and there is no way that we can reach compliance." "The Act is impossible for us to put into practice. The financial implications are such that we would have to close down if we followed it."

Closing down

The threat of closure was a common theme. Three children's homes actually had this as a proposal on their Management Committee agendas at the time. "The

non-increase in the subsidy over five years has already brought us to this point: the Basic Conditions of Employment Act is just the last straw." "The state is shooting itself in the foot: on the one hand it still finds children in need of care and asks us to care for them; on the other hand it then makes it impossible for us." "This is not consistent thinking on the part of the government." "It seems that children's homes did not feature when they made up this law – nobody spoke up for these children and the institutions." "We cannot contemplate raising this huge sum this year – our alternative is closure of our houses."

Three initiatives

A number of institutions have made individual approaches to state departments without success. One was told that a section of the Department of Welfare had

hired a consultant who had issued a 50-page report on the impact of labour legislation on welfare, but there was only one small reference to children's homes in the whole document. Another had "had no reaction from the Department of Welfare after writing on a number of occasions."

A group calling themselves the Basic Conditions of Service Act at Children's Homes (BACSATCH), representing 51 children's homes, has written to the Ministries of Labour and Welfare suggesting a "stay of execution" of twelve months, allowing everyone time to negotiate and seek solutions. They have received no response – apart from a telephone call asking how many children's homes were involved in BACSATCH.

A somewhat wider grouping, the Welfare Employers' Organisation of Southern Africa, has made representations to the Labour Depart-

ment. They have been advised that there was no chance of any redress on the clauses relating to working hours and night work among others.

Other approaches have applied for relief in clauses relating to overtime, rest periods, Sunday work and night shifts.

The NACCW has itself made representations to the Minister of Welfare last July, requesting urgent attention to and intervention in the matter.

What was most clear was that almost all the institutions we talked to felt powerless and were waiting for some development with one of these three initiatives.

Willing to seek solutions

One general feeling among those polled was an acceptance of the principles of the Act. "We're not asking to be excluded; we approve of such legislation. It's just that our circumstances are such that we don't fit easily into the rigid provisions of this Act." "A private fund raising organisation doing welfare work cannot simply rewrite its business plan to accommodate this Act. How do we reconcile these aspects?" "We believe that we – the children's homes and the state departments – can be more creative about finding solutions within the purposes of the Act."

Developmental Quality Assurance Plan (DQA)

A joint programme of the IMC and national and provincial Welfare Departments seeks to ensure effective care, development and protection of young people at risk. But Welfare Minister Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi points out that when state institutions were focussed upon in 1996, "non-government facilities were not given specific attention and I believe that this is now a critical issue if we want to accomplish transformation in the child and youth care system."

Funding

The Minister continues: "Welfare funding is a critical component of quality assurance within the

new framework. Furthermore the Basic Conditions of Employment Act is likely to impact negatively on non-government residential care and thus on the child and youth care system. Indeed, unless appropriate funding is addressed, we may shortly face a very serious crisis."

Challenges

The documentation for the DQA programme recognises that challenges at levels 2, 3 and 4 of the system "are mainly capacity, specialised training, effective use of funding and effective monitoring." It is felt that while some facilities and practitioners are providing adequate services,

and some even excellent services, "there are a number which are at best providing ineffective services and at worst violating the rights of children."

An aim of the DQA programme is within a 12-month period to fully assess the residential care and family reunification components of the system, particularly the non-government sector, and have development programmes towards minimum standards operational in at least 50% of facilities.

The programme also seeks to test out the best place for quality assurance services to be centred — with national or provincial welfare departments, or perhaps with "an independent appointed DQA group".

A time-frame extending over the next eighteen months has been drawn up.

UN REPORT

State of the world's children



"More than 130 million children of primary school age in developing countries, including 73 million girls, are growing up without access to basic education," says Carol Bellamy, Executive Director of UNICEF. The world can no longer afford such an enormous waste of human potential.

Nearly a billion people, two thirds of them women, will enter the 21st century unable to read a book or sign their names — much less operate a computer or understand a simple application form. And they will live, as now, in more desperate poverty and poorer health than most of those who can. They are the world's functional illiterates — and their numbers are growing.

from the 50 year old Universal Declaration of Human Rights to the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, the world's most universally embraced human rights instrument. This right has been a topic of discussion in numerous international meetings over the past 50 years and in every major United Nations summit and conference of the past decade.

Access

The State of the World's Children 1999 report, by Carol Bellamy, calls for an expansion of the education revolution that is occurring throughout the world. This revolution has two standards, namely access to high-quality learning and a child rights approach. The report highlights key examples both of individual schools and of entire national education systems that are putting these standards into practice. All that is lacking, the report argues, is the political will and the requisite resources to extend these educational benefits to all the world's children.

<http://www.unicef.org/sowc99/>



Carol Bellamy

The consequences of illiteracy are profound, even potentially life-threatening. They flow from the denial of a fundamental human right: the right to education, proclaimed in agreements ranging

South Africa's life expectancy likely to fall to 47 years

South Africa's average life expectancy is likely to plummet from 64 years to 47 in the next 12 years as the country finds itself on the brink of a full-blown AIDS epidemic, an international report warned.

Sub-Saharan Africa had 4 million new infections this past year, and rising death tolls could see 5500 deaths daily. The joint UN programme on AIDS/HIV and the World Health Organisation (WHO) report released in Geneva on 24 November 1998 says there were a further 5,8 million HIV infections world wide in 1998 — about 11 every minute. The total number of people living with the virus also rose by one-tenth to 33,4 million worldwide. Half the new infections are in the 15-24 group.

South Africa worst

Southern Africa is the hardest hit, says the report. Life expectancy in the region is set to plummet. In Botswana, where 25% of adults are infected, children born in the next few years can expect to live just past 40. Without the epidemic, life expectancies would be 70. In Botswana, Malawi, Kenya, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, Zambia and Zimbabwe (countries with an adult HIV prevalence of 10% or more), calculations show Aids will on average cut life expectancy by 17 years. By 2005-2010, 61 out of every 1000 infants born in South Africa are expected to die before one year. Without AIDS, infant mortality would be 38 per 1000. In Zimbabwe, the government estimates that in two years' time, 2400 Zimbabweans a week will be dying of AIDS.

Greatest challenge

In Botswana, Swaziland, Namibia and Zimbabwe, estimates show that between 20 and 26% of people aged 15-49 are living with HIV/AIDS. Peter Busse, director of the National Association of People living with HIV/AIDS, says it is a tragedy that already 3,2 million people in South Africa are living with AIDS, with another 550 000 newly infected each year. Busse adds that South Africa is facing one of its greatest challenges. South Africans have to be made aware that there will be close to 1 million Aids orphans in the next few years — and that a large number of children will be dying, he says.

(The Star)

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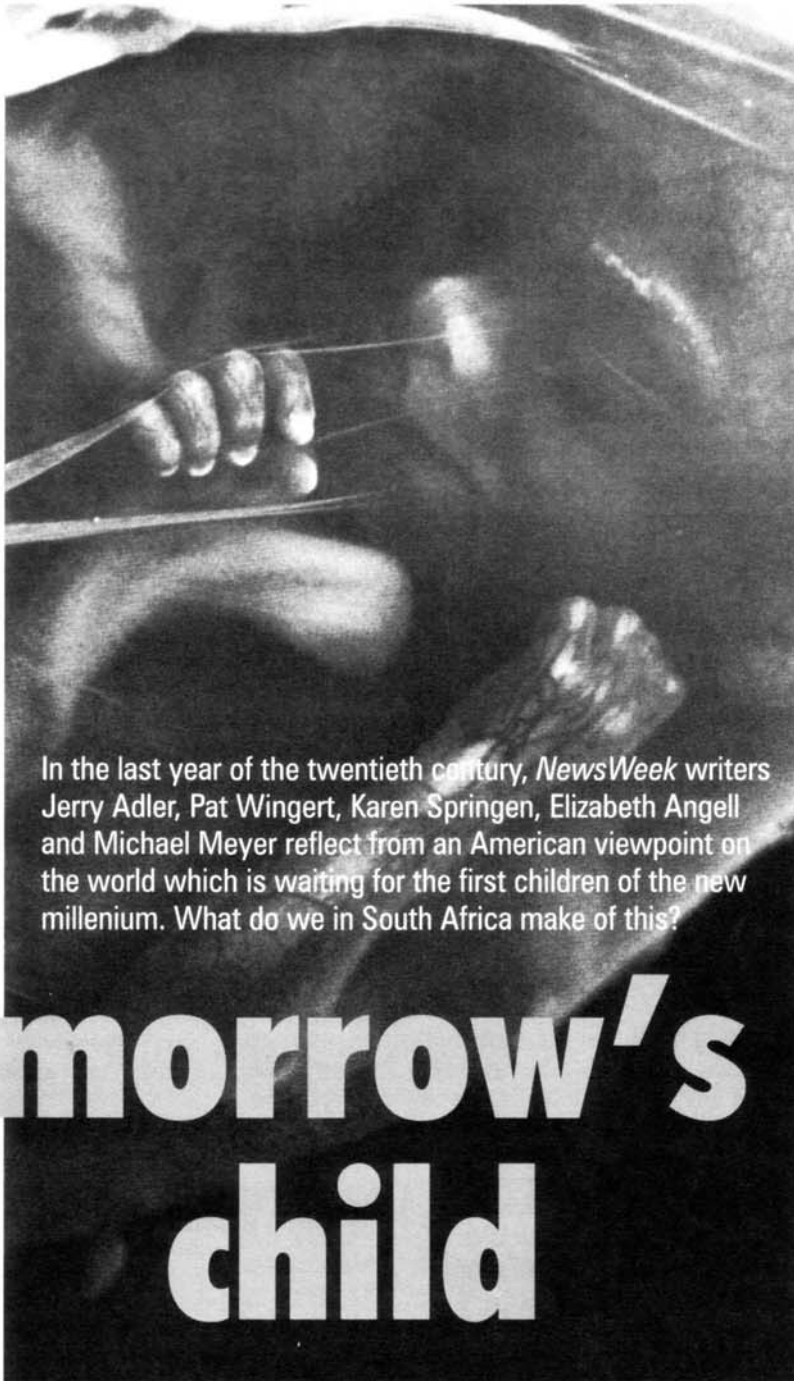
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In the last year of the twentieth century, *NewsWeek* writers Jerry Adler, Pat Wingert, Karen Springen, Elizabeth Angell and Michael Meyer reflect from an American viewpoint on the world which is waiting for the first children of the new millenium. What do we in South Africa make of this?

tomorrow's child

Amazing medical advances, great economic opportunities, earlier schooling and many new kinds of Barbie dolls are among the wonders in store for the first Americans of a new century.

She will be conceived, almost certainly, sometime in the next six months, and will tumble headfirst into the world nine months later, wholly unconscious of her uniqueness as the first American of the millennium. Escaping by a stroke of the clock the awful burden of the present century, she (or he) will never hear the screams at Dachau or see the sky burst into flames over Hiroshima; the cold war

will be as remote as the epic of Gilgamesh. For that matter, even the reruns of "Barney" will bear the musty reek of the classics. Some things are eternal, though, and present trends indicate that sometime in the next century the average American girl could have more Barbie dolls than she has classmates. Grandchild of baby boomers! The very phrase boggles the mind—although not so much, perhaps, as the fact that of the 3.9 million American children who will be born in the year 2000, at least 70,000 of them are expected to still be alive in 2100. First, though, they'll survive being dropped

on their heads in the delivery room when the Y2K computer bug shuts off the electricity. To each century belongs its own terrors, and also its own pleasures. The child born in the year 2000 may face epidemics of previously unknown tropical diseases, but he also may be able to eat broccoli Jell-O instead of broccoli. And the toy industry may come to the rescue of lonely kids with a doll designed to remind them of their mothers. "We have so many latchkey children in search of a human connection," muses marketing consultant Faith Popcorn. "They'll be able to carry their mother around in doll form!"

A lot has been written lately about the future as the venue for abstract breakthroughs in science, technology and medicine, but much less on the concrete questions of how people will actually live in it.

The American millennium baby will be born into a nation of approximately 275 million, the third largest in the world, and still growing; the midrange estimate of the Census Bureau is that the population will reach 323 million by 2020 and 394 million by midcentury. Where will all those people live? Mostly in California, Texas and Florida, which among them will account for almost three out of 10 Americans by 2025. They will be squeezed onto proportionately less land: the median lot size of a new single-family house will almost certainly continue the slow, steady drop of the last 20 years. But they will live in bigger houses; the median floor area will reach 2,000 square feet any year now, a 25 percent increase since 1977.

"The 800-square-foot Levittown house—that's a big family room now," says Columbia University historian Kenneth T. Jackson.

The cohort born circa 2000 should also benefit from what some economists are calling "the great asset sell-off" of the 21st century—the liquidation of family homes as the baby boomers start retiring in the second and third decades. "Younger Americans will get some great deals" on real estate, says Teresa Ghilarducci, a specialist in economic forecasting at Notre Dame. And, she adds, "it will be a great time to look for and get great jobs." But boomers will also be liquidating their investments, so stock-market values will stagnate. Except in some favored sun-belt locales, families moving out will create what Ghilarducci ominously calls "suburban wastelands." Down-

town neighborhoods that haven't gentrified by then will be just out of luck. The salient economic fact in the child's life may be the growing gap between the haves and have-nots, says Robert Litan, director of economic studies at the Brookings Institution. As disparities of wealth and income continue to widen, he says, "we could find ourselves living in a winner-take-all society. If people don't see economic opportunity, they drop out" of civil society. These trends will play themselves out in an America increasingly populated by minorities. By 2050, the Census Bureau projects an American population that is one-quarter black, Asian or Native American and one-quarter Hispanic. How the nation fares in the next century will depend on whether those changes widen the socioeconomic gap between races or help close it. And meanwhile, which of the children born in the year 2000 will be chosen for the Harvard class of 2022 — bearing in mind that by the time they enroll, the projected cost of a Harvard education will be more than \$320,000?

Life expectancy

There are a few things we can say with some assurance. Millennium babies will be about the same size as their parents. The long-term trend among Caucasians toward greater size is a factor of better nutrition, but as everyone knows, Americans are already maxed out when it comes to food consumption. Children born in the year 2000 will, however, live longer than ever: 73 years, on average, for a boy, and almost 80 for a girl—approximately double the average life expectancy of a newborn at the turn of the last century. And the figures are expected to rise steadily throughout the first half of the century. Those averages, though, conceal a wide disparity among different races. Whites, interestingly, are about in the middle; the category of Asians and Pacific Islanders will live the longest; blacks the shortest. It is a depressing statistic that a black male born in 2000 will have a life expectancy of 64.6 years—actually less than for an older brother born in 1995.

Some of the improvement in life span will come from reducing already low rates of infant death. Dr. James Marks of the Centers for Disease Control estimates that the mortality rate for newborns, around eight per 1,000 live births, could drop to as little as one per 1,000. Premature births account for many newborn deaths, but in the next decade, says bioethicist Arthur Caplan of the University of Pennsylvania, doctors will perform the astonishing feat of keeping alive babies born as early as 19 or 20 weeks after conception, weighing

In terms of psychological health, a new theory will revolutionize parents' attitudes toward child rearing. No one knows what the new theory will be, but there always is one.

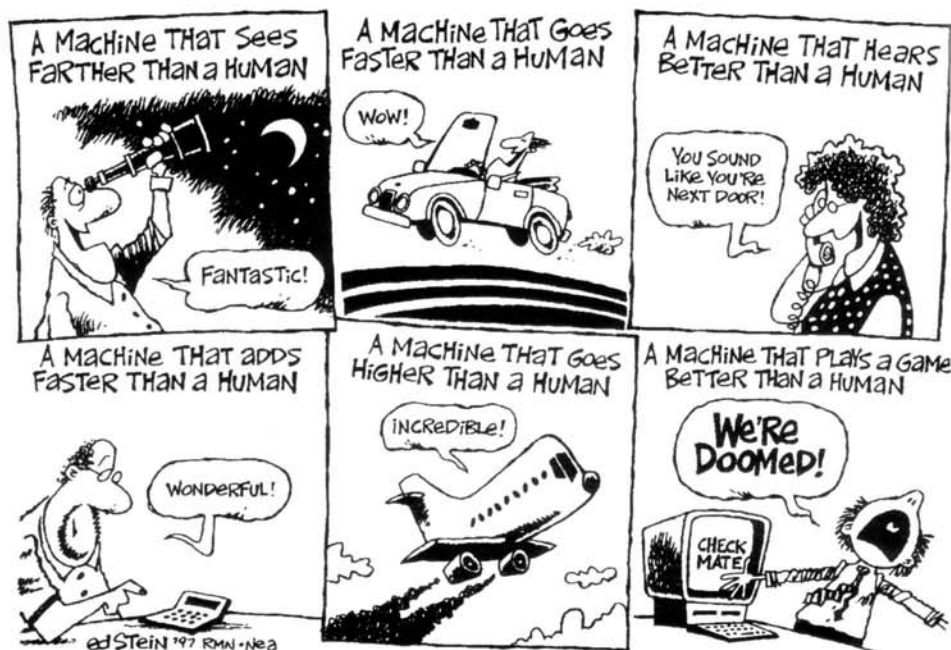
only eight ounces. Premies younger than about 24 weeks now almost invariably succumb to the failure of their underdeveloped lungs, but techniques are now being developed to allow them to breathe oxygen from a liquid solution until they can sustain themselves in the air. Even more impressive are advances forecast for *in utero* surgery. Already doctors can remove fetal tumors and correct conditions such as diaphragmatic hernia — a hole in the diaphragm that can cause serious lung problems. But standard open surgery on a living fetus is a very high-risk procedure. Within the next decade, surgeons will be performing these operations with the help of tiny cameras mounted on needlelike probes, according to Dr. Michael Harrison, head of the Fetal Treatment Center at the University of California, San Francisco. Ultimately, he expects, doctors will be able to do anything on a fetus that can be done after birth. "Heart repairs? We're working on them day and night [in animals]," Harrison says. "It hasn't been done in humans yet, but we will be there in the next century." The road map to the 21st century is being written now in the Human Genome Project, the monumentally ambitious attempt to catalog the entire complement of a normal person's DNA. When it's completed, in about 2003, researchers will be able to identify the genes responsible for many of mankind's most intractable afflictions — such as cystic fibrosis, muscular dystrophy and congenital immune deficiency. As a first step, doctors will be able to diagnose these diseases in utero, and parents will have the chance — and, consequently, the burden — of deciding whether to end

the pregnancy. (Some of these tests are already in use.) But by the early years of the next century doctors will perform the equivalent of alchemy, curing disease by directly tinkering with patients' DNA. They will synthesize normal copies of the defective gene, or altered genes that counteract it, and attach them to a "vector" such as a benign virus to carry them into the patient's cells. In combination with Harrison's fetal-surgery techniques, it may be possible to cure congenital conditions even before birth.

Health threats

For most babies born in the year 2000, smoking and overeating obviously will be a bigger threat to health than birth defects. Childhood obesity "is up dramatically since the '80s," says Marks of the CDC, and is expected to increase among kids who lift a finger only to click a mouse button. But routine genetic screening early in the next century will make a difference there, too, by identifying the health risks specific to each individual. The public-health lesson of this century is that people generally change their lifestyles only under the threat of death, which is why those born in the future will probably not have to sit through so many public-service exhortations about fitness from Arnold Schwarzenegger. Instead, doctors will tell them which particular risks they run, and what they have to do to stay alive—including, for example, the nutritional supplements that will do them the most good. On smoking, diet and exercise the advice is probably going to be pretty much the same as it is now — except that there are always people who will live a long time no

The evolution of humankind



matter what they eat. One of the great pleasures of living in the next century may be finding out you're one of them. In terms of psychological health, a new theory will revolutionize parents' attitudes toward child rearing. No one knows what the new theory will be, but there always is one. The 20th century's succession of mutually contradictory panaceas (more structure; more freedom; it doesn't make a difference) shouldn't obscure the point that until about the 1940s, "most parents didn't give much thought to child development at all," says Jerome Singer, a Yale child psychologist. "From a parenting point of view, children are better off today, and will be better off in the next few decades. Parents realize children need attention and oversight of what's going on in their lives, and those beliefs are penetrating into the lower socioeconomic groups."

And if kids persist in being maladjusted, there will be lots more ways to treat them. Caplan foresees radical new therapies that will rely on virtual-reality simulators (so the patient can practice, say, controlling his aggression in a mock situation) and brain scans that will tell the therapist on the spot whether the patient was learning. With this technique, he says, "you could look for change in real time," a boon to patients and insurance companies alike. There also will be many more problems to treat. The frontier of therapy in the next century will be "sub-syndromal" conditions such as mild depression, social phobias and anxieties. "We'll be treating emotional disabilities that we don't even label today," says Dr. Solomon H. Snyder, who heads the department of neuroscience at Johns Hopkins University. The debates over Prozac and Ritalin, which some authorities suspect are being prescribed indiscriminately, prefigure what will be two of the most important questions in 21st-century medical ethics: How far should we go in "enhancing" people who are essentially normal? And who will pay for it?

Better teaching?

And periodically someone will invent the one and only best method to teach reading, rendering all other techniques hopelessly obsolete. It might well involve computers; there is already a burgeoning market for what's called "lapware," software aimed at children under a year old, who do their computing while sitting on Mommy's lap. "I've seen some that attempt to teach kids to associate letters and sounds with colors," says a very dubious David Elkind, a professor of child development at Tufts University. "That's a skill most children don't have until they're 4 or 5." Whatever the new movement is,

it will provoke an equally strong reaction as soon as parents discover that it doesn't automatically turn their toddlers into John Updike. "The reading wars"—basically pitting old-fashioned phonics against everything else—"have been going on for a century and a half, so what chance do we have of ending them by the year 2000?" says Timothy Shanahan, a professor of education at the University of Illinois-Chicago.

The truth, well known to researchers, is that most kids can learn to read with almost any method, and will do it by themselves if left alone with a pile of books. And there will still be books in the next century. As births increased in the 1980s, the number of new children's titles published annually doubled, even as families started buying computers for the first time. Paula Quint, president of the Children's Book Council, expects that as births level off over the next few years the number of new titles will hold steady at about 5,000 a year. A few of these may even turn into classics, but it's safe to say that in the next century and beyond, kids will still be put to bed with "Goodnight Moon."

The change that is likely to make a real difference in the lives of millennium kids is a mundane one: the slow adoption of universal pre-K education. Most of the kids who attend preschool now are from relatively well-off families, even though research shows that the programs most benefit poor children. A few states, in search of a morally unassailable use of gambling proceeds, are dedicating them to providing free programs for 4-year-olds. "In 10 years," predicts Anne Mitchell, a consultant on early-childhood programs, "free preschool will be commonplace." And in so many other ways, the year 2000 will be a great time to be born. Kids will have terrifically cool ethnic names like Pilar, Selena or Kai—although there may also be a countertrend, fueled by millennial religious fervor, for Biblical names like Isaiah and Elijah. Their mothers are more likely to breast-feed them than has been true for a generation (a quarter of all mothers nursed their children for at least six months last year, up from about 5 percent in 1971). And they will be able, if their parents don't mind, to run around in diapers until they're almost 4. Recognizing a trend toward later toilet training (and bigger kids), Procter Gamble recently introduced Pampers in size 6, for toddlers 35 pounds and over. Of course, kids who are kept in diapers until the age of 4 can only help drive up the cost of raising them, which, according to U.S. Department of Agriculture statistics, will amount to approximately \$250,000 for the first 18 years

of a millennium baby's life.

Inevitably, part of that sum will go toward the purchase of Barbie dolls. In the early 1980s, most girls were content with one Barbie; the average collection is now up to 10 and likely to rise in the future as Mattel expands the line into infinity—adding just this year, for example, Chilean, Thai, Polish and Native American Barbies. Last year Mattel added a wheelchair Barbie, and a spokeswoman suggests "there may be more dolls with other disabilities in the future."

Kids more like adults

Yes, the kid of the future will be, if anything, even more pampered and catered to than the fabled baby boomers themselves, at least in part because there's so much money to be made off them. Leaving the house at 7:30 in the morning for 12-hour days of school, restaurants and shopping, they will require ever-more-elaborate "urban survival clothes," like the currently popular cargo pants in whose capacious pockets one can stow a meatball grinder, a palmtop computer and a jar of The Limited's most exciting new cosmetic product, fruit-scented antibacterial glitter gel. In what marketing guru Popcorn regards as one of the most significant social trends of the next millennium, "cross-aging," kids will be more like adults (and vice versa): "We're going to see health clubs for kids, kids as experts on things like the Internet, and new businesses, like Kinko's for Kids, to provide professional-quality project presentations." The travel market of the future will increasingly be geared to kids, and not just at theme parks—24 million business trips included children in 1996, up 160 percent from 1991.

So, to anyone who may have wondered whether it was right to bring a child into the uncertain world of the 21st century, it's fair to say, your fears are groundless. The next millennium is going to be great for kids.

It's the adults who will miss the 1990s.

The truth, well known to researchers, is that most kids can learn to read with almost any method, and will do it by themselves if left alone with a pile of books.



Questions and answers for 1999

We start by saluting the men and women who have worked tirelessly to put the child and youth care profession where it is today – as well as those who work, day and night, in the interests of the children who deserve competent care services.

For some of us, the dawn of 1999 raises more questions than answers. We have challenged the PAS for Social Auxiliary Workers which demeaned and demotivated us, as the talk moved in some provinces to CORE. But when even the seniors in many residential settings do not understand the roles and functions of child and youth care workers, how will child care workers in government institutions truly grow? At the same time we should face the reality that many of the child care workers themselves do not have qualifications in the field. Two wrongs do not make a right ...

We not want to accept that those who have attained UNISA and NACCW qualifications have done so in vain. We do not want to accept that the efforts that went into raising the status of child care were fruitless. Nor do we want to accept that so many men and women, committed to the interests of children and experienced in the field, should be relegated to take back seats as subservients or that their contribution during trying times should go unnoticed. It is time for child and youth care workers to take charge of the issues that pertain to them – and for those who legislate and make regulations for them to ask child care workers for their viewpoints and opinions.

Interests of the children

However much we may disagree on these issues, the interests of the children in our care supersede all other interests. No matter what course we child care workers may take, and no matter how noble this may sound, we can never allow this to put the young people in our care at risk of danger, neglect

or abandonment. This is our appeal to fellow child care workers. We urge all to start improving your qualifications and sharing your ideas to improve the lives of young people in care. The days of self-pity are gone. We should start asserting ourselves. No one can wish us away; we are here to stay; and we are a force to be reckoned with. A word of warning to any who don't hear the needs of the children through all of this: if your only aim is to collect your cheque at the end of the month, you should consider your position carefully and decide whether you are perhaps in the wrong field – and whether it is time to move on. For the rest of us, child and youth care is our passion, and we do not want those who judge us to regard us as lazy and incompetent.

Recommit ourselves

A word in conclusion to managers, administrators and policymakers: you can no longer give only lip service to the interests of child care workers. When caregivers are belittled, demoralised and burned out, what effect do they then have on young people at risk? All of us in the child and youth care system should start this year by pledging to serve the children and their families to the utmost of our abilities and to recommit ourselves to the transformation which seeks to protect all children and youth from injustice and abuse.

Nkwapa D. Moloto and Peter L. Mabotja

More empty words

I refer to the Minister's thank you letter to all child and youth care workers. Does the minister really believe that child and youth care workers live on words alone?

I felt a fraud distributing her letters to my staff on her behalf. The Department has done absolutely nothing in the past four years to alleviate the financial plight of private children's organisations. On the contrary, demands have increased, service expectations have been raised and financially crippling legislation such as the Basic Conditions of Employment Act has been passed. None of this has made our work any easier or given us any reason to feel "deeply valued".

Something everyone understands

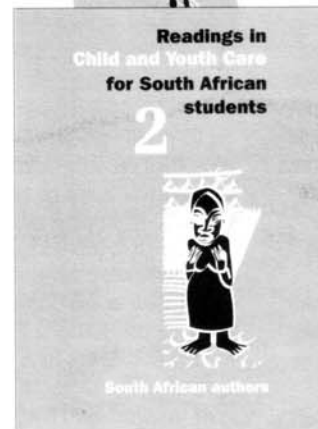
The time has surely come when all the good intentions, bright ideas and nice words need to be translated into something everyone understands – more money in the pay packets at the end of each month. Perhaps the Minister should only have sent this letter to child and youth care workers employed by her Department. At least they earn decent salaries (by comparison) and can afford to pay for an annual holiday.

Ernie Nightingale

Principal, Ethelbert Children's Home



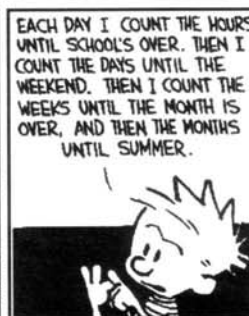
The second book in this series has now been published — 218 pages, soft-covered, and available to all — at R50 per copy plus R5 packing/postage.



Of particular interest is the fact that all of the readings in this volume are by South African authors. You can secure your copy of **Readings in Child and Youth Care for South African Students: 2** by sending your cheque/postal order for R55 to NACCW Publications Unit, P.O. Box 23199, Claremont 7735.

NACCW
Publications Unit

Calvin and Hobbes



Bill Waterson



ecstasy

So, we're sick of reading about drugs. Tough. The newspapers try to shock us with gruesome tales of ecstasy deaths — but the side-effects of "e" can be equally scary. This feature is based, with acknowledgements, on a recent report in the United Kingdom by teen magazine *J17*

In August last year 17-year-old Rebecca Holton cheated death after taking two ecstasy tablets. Her lungs collapsed and she was put on a ventilator, but she pulled through. Fitness instructor Julia Dawes, 18, wasn't so lucky. She took two ecstasy tablets while celebrating a friend's birthday just weeks earlier. Two days later she was dead. Her life-support machine was turned off when her parents were told there was no hope of her recovering from her coma.

Both stories brought back haunting memories of Leah Betts's death on her 18th birthday three years ago. Back then, her parents released pictures of their daughter's comatose body to the media with the aim of shocking young people out of using Ecstasy. For some, the harrowing photos did their job, and no doubt Julia's death and Rebecca's near-miss will have a similar effect. But it obviously isn't enough to change the minds of all the 1.5 million teenagers taking E every week, who believe it could never happen to them.

Risky business

Experts believe ecstasy kills at least 20 Britons a year — most of them under 30, compare this to the 33,000 alcohol related deaths a year in Britain, and it would seem that the papers are exaggerating the dangers of ecstasy, so what's all the fuss about, and why all the hype?

John Ramsey is head of the toxicology unit at St George's Hospital Medical School in London, where information on drugs and their ef-

fects is collected. He told *J17*, "The problem with the publicity surrounding ecstasy is that it is misplaced. The media focuses on the sensational aspect — the deaths it causes — instead of the far more likely risk of long-term damage to the brain, the liver and the kidneys."

The truth is, a few deaths might not frighten the life out of you, but the damage to the rest of your body could be hitting thousands of users because they're not fully informed of the risks involved.

Even scientists can't be sure of the exact risks, but what they do know is that the chemicals in ecstasy alter a chemical in the brain, one which deals with moods and depression.

Mr Ramsey also warns that buying ecstasy is a lottery. "The drugs are made in places like garages and illicit warehouses all around the world," he says. "There's no quality control whatsoever, so users have no idea what's in them."

But it's not just the experts who are warning about the dangers of ecstasy. Madison and Allison, two teenage girls who've used the drug, are well aware how it can seriously mess up your life. Luckily they both survived to tell their tales.

Allison's story

Allison started taking speed when she was 15 and worked her way through cocaine and on to ecstasy. By the time she was 17 she was

e-notes

We asked Peter Powis, a former editorial board member of this journal and Director of Stepping Stones Addiction Treatment Centre in Kommetjie, to add any information of special importance to readers of this journal.

It is important to remember that E, like all drugs, affects different people in different ways. Some people may use E occasionally without wanting to use more and without developing a psychological addiction or harmful side effects.

Children and young adults most at risk are those who have grown up in traumatic home environments and who are less emotionally stable; those with one or more par-

ents who are addicts or alcoholics, and those with certain medical conditions such as epilepsy or heart disease.

Kids who are going through emotionally unstable stages in their lives are more likely to want to use drugs to escape, but are also more likely to have negative experiences using E. Especially vulnerable are kids who have experienced a trauma such as a rape.

It is crucial to remember that unless one is involved in the manufacturing of the drug, one does not know what it contains. Sometimes the adulterants which are mixed with the drug combine with the MDMA to cause very disturbing experiences. Ketamine is one such adulterant which often causes experiences of extreme disorientation and sometimes fear and panic.

taking up to six Es a night – sometimes four nights a week. “I started because I hung around with a bad crowd who were a lot older than me. Then my mum and dad split up and I had a lot of family problems, so I took even more as a way of getting attention.

“My first E took me some place in my head I’d never been before. I wanted to go there again but my tolerance levels built up, so I took more and more to get the same effect. Sometimes my mates and I would just sit in my bedroom, take E and trip out watching TV.”

Allison had no idea of the possible side effects. It wasn’t until she was 18 and took a bad E that she found out the hard way. “I bought an E from a different dealer at a friends’ barbecue – half an hour later it blew my mind. I was eating some fish and it suddenly seemed to come alive on the plate. I looked around and everyone was disoriented. I watched as a girl’s head imploded, then exploded.”

Half an hour later Allison was on the floor having convulsions and fits. “I was terrified. A few of my friends took me home and stayed with me all night. Nobody wanted to take me to hospital because they were scared of being done for possession of drugs. I was violently sick all night and kept having convulsions. All the time I was tripping like crazy. The street lights seemed to turn into dinosaurs and the stubble on my legs turned into spikes. I’ve always had a phobia of having a limb amputated and really believed I had no legs. I was absolutely petrified.”

After this experience, Allison knew she would never take drugs again. Unfortunately, coping with the after-effects of her decision wasn’t as easy as she thought. For six months she hardly slept, she had bad panic attacks when she went to work or out with friends, she was depressed, had violent mood swings and couldn’t eat. “My whole life fell apart. I couldn’t do anything. I was so paranoid I thought everyone hated me, and everything – even watching TV – frightened me. I felt like I was going completely loopy.”

Allison’s doctor put her on tranquilisers and anti-depressants and arranged for her to see a psychiatrist. In a couple of weeks her mood swings had calmed and she was able to sleep for up to five hours. The psychiatrist also taught her how to cope with her panic attacks by imagining calm surroundings and doing deep breathing. Three months later Allison was able to watch TV, although she still wasn’t relaxed enough to sit down, and she could go out for a couple of hours at a time.

She’s now 19, is into keep-fit and has a regular job. “I didn’t notice at the time, but while I was doing drugs I was an un-

healthy, extremely moody person and only ever thought of myself. Now I’m much more considerate, I’m healthy and have a love for life.

She still suffers from bouts of paranoia though, and is unable to cope with any kind of confrontation. “I never watch violent movies because they turn me into a nervous wreck. And I never watch the news or read papers because I can’t cope with bad news. People reading this will probably think it will never happen to them but I reckon anyone who take E is a human guinea pig.”

Madison’s story

Friends introduced Madison to recreational drugs when she was 15. Two years later, when her boyfriend Jimi dumped her, her habit snowballed into regular weekend benders of clubbing coupled with cocktails of alcohol and Es. “I was so depressed I wanted to hurt myself,” she says. “I knew taking up to four Es a night was dangerous but I didn’t care. I just wanted Jimi to take notice of me.”

One day Madison was suddenly rushed to hospital after contracting Hepatitis A, a contagious disease which attacks the liver, causing jaundice and sickness.

Catching it had nothing to do with taking ecstasy, but being in hospital gave her a life-saving opportunity to change her lifestyle.

Madison didn’t realise that ecstasy had altered levels of chemicals in her brain, causing hypomania, a condition which triggers severe mood swings, paranoia and depression. “I felt like I was going mad. My brain felt like a computer that was running too fast and I couldn’t find the ‘off’ switch. My sentences were all jumbled up and I was rambling.”

She was given tranquilisers to calm her down and anti-depressants. For the first week she was under 24-hour care in case she attempted suicide. “I only stayed in the hospital because I know I couldn’t cope with life outside. E had screwed me up so much I’d basically had a mental breakdown.”

But Madison went through therapy and was discharged two days before she turned 18. “I’d gone from seven to nine-and-a-half stone, my hair was shiny and my skin looked healthy. I still had bouts of depression, but I wasn’t suicidal any more.” Madison eventually hopes to one day become a counsellor herself and help other people who have drug problems.

Thrills with pills?

So is ecstasy a deadly killer?

We know there have been about 60 deaths in the UK as a result of the drug, but if that’s not serious enough for you,

Some Ecstasy Facts

Ecstasy is a Class A drug and if you are caught using it you risk a maximum penalty of seven years in prison and/or a fine. If you’re caught supplying Ecstasy you risk a maximum of life imprisonment and/or a fine.

Other names for Ecstasy include “E”, XTC, doves, disco biscuits, echoes, hug drug, eccies, burgers and fantasy. Its chemical name is MDMA.

It is widely believed by users that Ecstasy is a relatively safe stimulant. In fact, the opposite is true: it speeds up the heart and blocks the communication between the brain and the major organs, so that the user does not receive the warning signals which the body needs to slow down – a dangerous situation which can lead to heat stroke, blood clots and brain haemorrhages in the short term. Its use has been linked to liver and kidney problems, and depression, anxiety, panic attacks and nervous breakdowns. Dancing for a long time increases the user’s chances of overheating and dehydrating. Drinking water prevents dehydration, but drinking too much can trigger a fatal brain swelling which is what happened to Leah Betts. Anyone who takes E should make sure they chill out regularly and sip about a pint of a non-alcoholic fluid such as fruit juice, isotonic sports drink or water every hour.

experts say the *real* problems are long-term physical and mental ones. While 1.5 million people gamble with their health and their lives every weekend, we leave it for you to decide if you’re willing to take the risk.



There are three things which bubble to the top of my list of concerns as we all start 1999:

1. Most serious is the on-going **financial stress** which we are experiencing. None of us is spared this, and I know that young people, staff and whole institutions find themselves very vulnerable right now.

2. My second concern is about the **morale in the field** as a result of these difficulties and the uncertainty about the future. Though most stay positive, hundreds of child and youth care workers (and even a number of institutions) question the worth of going on. We have to remember that our first priority is the children in our care right now. It is the ultimate test of our professionalism that at times like this we do our best work.

3. Third concern is the impact of the **Basic Conditions of Employment Act** — not that such legislation includes our field, which is quite acceptable, but that its planning and application seems not to have been carefully thought through in terms of the special circumstances of most private child care organisations.

Perhaps the real challenge to us is not these problems in themselves, but what we as child and youth care people can make of them. Our history tells us that it was at crisis times — wars, sudden urbanisation and great population shifts, epidemics and economic de-

pressions — that child care services went through their greatest growth periods and were at their most inventive. And at all of these times morale was at its lowest and resources the most scarce. It was the people who made things happen.

And in 1999 there are **encouraging** developments for us to look forward to and in which I hope you will all participate. Our minds will be first of all on the children and youth and their families; then on ourselves as we do this work and improve our personal skills; and then on the evolving and transforming child and youth care system itself.

Kids and families

We have a theme for the year, a focus of our thinking on the idea of **engaging** with those we work with. We will be at our most effective as adults who are in a position to support and influence young people at risk when we are in close personal touch with them. Gerry Fewster recently suggested that this means being "energetically present" with people. We all have to do this. When we are on duty, no matter what other tasks we may have, the children must feel that we are people who stop for them, who listen, who are seriously interested, who encourage, who provide opportunity and who help. Let's all be conscious this year, together, of our ability to engage with kids.



FROM THE

Director

Child care workers

In July we have our **Biennial Conference** in Johannesburg. Over the years we have seen the local content of conferences increase and improve. We are always stimulated and inspired by our conferences, and we hope to see more practitioners presenting this year. There will be info each month in the journal, and also a conference web site. Big training news is the launch this year of the **B.Tech degree** in our field. It is very exciting that this is being done through the Technikon, for this will be accessible, user-friendly training, strongly linked to practice and, with the possibility of continuing degrees, leading to the sky! Note that once this course is in the Technikon system, it could in time become available at your

local Technikon, and therefore be even more reachable. For most of us, the normal **NACCW training courses** continue as before. Ask at your local NACCW office for a leaflet on the various courses available. A special opportunity later this year will be the **international exchange project** with Denmark's Federation of Social Educators. This is so important since it offers a number of South Africans the chance to see and experience effective child and youth care programmes and practice — and thus to develop a vision beyond the limits of our own previous experience.

The system

Project GO kick-started the transformation and this process will continue. It is to be followed by a capacity building process known as **Developmental Quality Assurance**, to run under the auspices of the IMC (see news pages this month). DQA is designed to help facilities develop a plan for meeting minimum standards. In the **Make a Difference** project we are seeing exciting changes as more children's homes or shelters become child and youth care centres which offer differentiated programmes.

The best for 1999. Keep in touch,

THE NATIONAL FEDERATION OF SOCIAL EDUCATORS (DENMARK) IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CHILD CARE WORKERS (SOUTH AFRICA)

Applications invited for an International Study/Observation Tour, Denmark 1999

Applications are invited from current individual members of the NACCW to participate in a two-week study and observation tour to Denmark later in 1999 to learn from a number of child and youth care programmes.

Registration as a child and youth care professional will be an advantage, with sound and advanced skills in on-line practice. Applicants should have a background of study, work and contribution to the field, with a willingness to continue to share this experience.

Enquiries, which should include your CV and a letter of recommendation, your NACCW membership number, and an outline of your own special skills and practice interests, may be sent by 20 February to:

**The Director, NACCW
P.O. Box 36407
GLOSDERRY 7702**

or faxed to **(021) 697-4123**

Masihambeni

into the new millennium



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CHILD CARE WORKERS

Twelfth Biennial Conference

SA TECHNIKON CONFERENCE CENTRE, 2 VINTON ROAD,
ORMONDE EXT 1, JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA

5, 6 and 7 JULY 1999

CONFERENCE FEE

Full Three Days: Individual members of NACCW: R330.00
Non-members: R440.00 (Members receive a 25% discount)
The above includes lunch, teas and cocktail party (cash bar)

Daily Rate: Individual members of NACCW: R120.00
Non-members: R160.00. Daily rate includes lunch and teas only
Cocktail party R30.00 extra per person (cash bar)

Vending and tuck shop facilities are available at the conference
venue, where the telephone number is: (011) 835-1001

SECOND CALL FOR PAPERS

Papers, workshops, presentations, display and exhibitions should focus on developmental programmes and practice which have relevance for South African child and youth care in the new millennium.

Please send your proposals to NACCW Conference, P.O. Box 751013,
Garden View 2047, or fax to (011) 484-2928. Assistance is available
to any who need help in developing their proposal.

NACCW

Conference Web Site
www.pretext.co.za/naccw/conference
e-mail: masihambeni@iafrica.com

Hi!
I'm
new
here



Just sitting here in the corner, keeping out of the way and watching all the going-on, I must tell you it's pretty scary being new in a place. I'm not sure what's around the next corner, let alone the complex geography of the whole place. Are those two really hurting each other — or are they just playing? Is there a dog (or worse, *dogs!*) around here? I haven't seen any yet, and I still don't know who are the good guys and who are the bad guys.

I hope you'll notice me here, and that you'll realise how I'm feeling. No one has said Hello yet, and right now I'm very much the outsider. I'm not being anti-social sitting over here — and I really wouldn't mind if you felt like picking me up off the floor for a while.

It's specially bad when everyone runs out of the room and goes off somewhere, and I don't know what I'm supposed to do — stay here or go along.

I know I scratched that one kid just now, but he was poking that stick at me and I thought he wanted to hurt me. Nobody told him to stop. If you give me a chance you'll find that I'm very nice, actually, and if you like, I'd love to play with you — or just sit on your lap.

I also need to know a few things, like where's the door (I have to go outside every now and then and it's embarrassing not knowing how to ask) and do you think I'll find someone here who likes me and will I be safe? And would you be my friend? If I can get through today (and maybe tomorrow) I'll be OK, I'm sure.

Two last things: who feeds us when we're hungry, and where do I sleep? And do you maybe have a little milk?

