

Die kinderversorger The child care worker

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Action Care Trust to raise R1 Million Annually for NACCW

At a press conference at the Rand Afrikaans University on October 27 Action Care Trust, a promotional and fund-raising organisation for the NACCW, was launched before the nation's newspapers, radio and TV. Present were well-known TV presenter, Marius du Plooy, and Susanne Maree, also of SATV, who make up the Action Care Trust team. Representing the NACCW were National Chairman Ernie Nighthingale, National Director Brian Gannon, Dr. Rudolph van Niekerk who is Chairman of the Transvaal Regional Executive, Molly Painter, child care training officer for the Transvaal attached to RAU, and Johann Mostert, also of the Transvaal Executive.

Introducing the conference, Dr van Niekerk said that the child care profession in South Africa continued to struggle against various handicaps such as shortages of trained staff, and that talking about it would not give the children in care a better deal. Children's homes were no longer orphanages or simply homes for poor children, and needed to realise that they were expected to provide specialist care for troubled and disturbed children. Food, clothing and shelter were only the beginning of the story. To ensure that each and every child's needs were met demanded a major development in child care services in this country.



A working group of the Transvaal Executive, Johann Mostert, Jackie Michael, Rudolph van Niekerk and Di Levine, meet with the National Director to plan the press conference for the launching of Action Care Trust.

Ernie Nighthingale stated that while manpower and training were major issues in South Africa today, the child care profession was one of the worst served in this regard. It was disturbing that all recent research showed that children's homes were not in a position to appoint staff with either training or experience. Also, the profession still lost one-third of its staff every year, and this had an on-going tragic effect on the children who suffered repeatedly broken relationships with adults.

Molly Painter felt that while it was encouraging that there were 250 child care workers receiving formal training, this was still a small fraction of child care workers in South Africa. The whole infrastructure of training and staff recruitment needed radical development.



1984

Die NVK Kerskaartjie

The NACCW Christmas Card

Aantreklike Kerskaartjies

met 'n eenvoudige kindersorg motief
verskaf met kouverte (10,5 x 15 cm)
teen R1.50 per pakkie van tien

Elegant Christmas Cards

with a simple child care theme
supplied with envelopes (10,5 x 15 cm)
at R1.50 per pack of ten

HET U AL U KERSKAARTJIES BESTEL?
HAVE YOU ORDERED YOUR CARDS?

seen children being kept in limbo through hesitancy, regard for parents' rights, lengthy discourse and hence slow, bureaucratic decision-making. Of course, every system has its faults, and I have been able to see the benefits of the South African Place of Safety which at least fulfills a holding function while removal issues are being finalised.

A major function of the child care worker in South Africa is that of assessment. Many children's homes do not have access to a clinical psychologist and children are accepted into homes on the basis of sometimes nebulous reports by social workers, and so workers must observe and assess children on the unit before treatment planning by the staff team can take place. Not so in Oregon, where the child arrives on the unit only after extensive interviews and testing by intake workers, family counsellors, consultant psychiatrists and educational diagnosticians. At that point an extensive task definition is already established, and the treatment co-ordinator must produce a working plan and step-by-step methods for working with the child. Thus the child care worker is able to focus immediately on the problems as well as the strengths of the child, and care is taken that the tasks expected of the child care worker are within his professional understanding and expertise.



Staff at the Friedrich Schweizer Kinderheim in Kenilworth, recently visited by the Director, Sybille Otto, child care worker, Sandy Spence, social worker, and Heide Hayn, principal, with her husband Hartmut.

Johann Mostert expressed the view that training could not be limited to child care workers, but that management committees also needed constant support and information for their role as planners and providers for child care programmes. In effect the NACCW had to reach almost as many management committee members as child care workers.

Brian Gannon expressed disappointment that the issues being raised by other speakers were the same today as at the 1951 Kimberley conference on children's homes 33 years before. With millions being spent annually on sports sponsorships, he questioned whether South Africa had its priorities right. In his view the children's home problem in South Africa was still small enough to represent a reachable goal. "There are larger issues in this country which will take much of our attention for years to come, such as education and housing, but let us at least get our services for institutionalised children in order today. Right now South Africa cannot be entirely proud of its children's service."

Action Care Trust, headed up by Marius du Plooy and Susanne Marce, aims to raise R1 million a year for the NACCW. Priority spending will go to such areas as creating a

training infrastructure for child care (including training bursaries for children's homes so that newly-appointed staff may undergo training before being allowed to practise alone), the appointment of Regional Directors (at present the National Director is expected to cover all four regions and the rural areas), regional services including recruitment and screening of staff and professional services for children in homes, as well as publications and research.

Action Care Trust is the brain-child of Dr Rudolph van Niekerk, Chairman of the Transvaal Region. "I have watched with increasing admiration what the children's homes in South Africa do on shoe-string budgets. I have watched with increasing amazement what the NACCW has achieved with virtually no budget at all. In South Africa there is no shortage of the will to care for children, and no shortage of the will to care for the care-givers — but the shortage of money and manpower has us all caught up in our own whirlpools. The task is so great that it is only a massive input of money and manpower today which will help us all reach our goal of better child care services in this country. For the 20 000 children living in our institutions today, tomorrow will be too late."



Merle Allsopp, senior child care worker at St Michael's Home in Cape Town, is on a one year's ILEX exchange programme working in a children's treatment centre in the U.S.A.

Accountability and Assessment

There has been a positive and exciting growth of growing familiarity with the agency for which I work and more contact with child care generally in the state of Oregon. I have become aware of the importance attached to accountability in child and youth work in this country, an issue very superficially addressed in South Africa.

By accountability I refer to individual child care workers' responsibility for their actions and agencies' responsibility both to parents and the community for the provision of effective treatment. Community and consumer attitudes — the lawsuit

mentality — certainly underlie this emphasis in the USA, and it appears to me that covering oneself for all ones actions when working with other people's children can only be positive.

The attitude of accountability is evident in many ways here at Edgefield Lodge: the writing of special incident reports where, by any out-of-the-ordinary happening is recorded and filed; weekly behaviour summaries which enable anyone glancing at a file immediately to discern problem areas being worked on. It involves more paper work, but this is justified by the advantages of continuity and credibility.

South African child care workers who spend such long periods in direct work with children find it hard to give high priority to this aspect and it tends to be neglected. But verbal reports to superiors are insufficient in an agency with professional standards like this and whose actions must be open to scrutiny by both friend and foe.

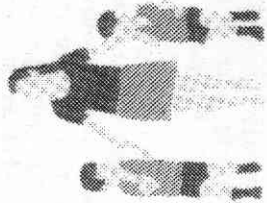
Many rules of procedure relating to staff interaction with children result from this attitude towards accountability. I was amazed, for instance, that when children were swimming, a ratio of one adult to three children had to be maintained — obviously a sensible ruling, but one which would be totally impractical in a South African setting.

The rights of the child are in many ways protected by an attitude of caution like this. Many American children appear to have a knowledge of their rights and what they can expect in treatment, which seems to me very positive, though often used in a calculating way by children. Staff-child ratios obviously feature very strongly in this issue. In a recent incident of restraint a child accused the child care worker of abusing him — and immediately there was a supervisor present on the spot to observe the actions of the child care worker, and to add an element of reality to the child's perception of what was taking place.

There are situations where children fall victim to an over-cautious system. Oregon's policy is to maintain a child in his own home wherever possible, and whilst I am in agreement with such a policy, I have

Child Care Workers

Applications are invited from people with appropriate training to join a multidisciplinary team working with children of all ages. Preference will be given to applicants who are in possession of a driver's licence. Telephone the Principal on 021-638-3127 for an Application Form.



Annie Starck Village