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Child and Youth Care

A Journal for Those Who Work With Children and Youth at Risk and Their Families

Learning to Cope
with Stresses and
Strains of Adolescence
By Gisela Konopka

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Snakes and Ladders

Merle Allsopp

Undoubtedly child and youth care work has made tremendous strides towards being recognized as a professional endeavour in the post-apartheid South Africa. As we look back over this period, we can see that every now and then something happened that particularly made us feel we had *arrived* as a profession! The IMC document on the interim policy recommendations for the child and youth care system clearly articulated the role of the child and youth care worker for the first time in an official policy document, and in the game of transformation 'Snakes and Ladders' this was a long ladder. Child and youth care shot up along the path of professional recognition with this publication - as it did when the ex Social Work Act was amended to allow for the registration of social service occupational groups other than social work. The field had to apply for recognition as a separate autonomous group, in terms of this amended legislation (then called the Social Services Professions Act). The application made on behalf of the field was successful, and up we shot on yet another ladder.

For a while the 'snakes' in this game of Snakes and Ladders that is our journey towards professionalising the field were few. We seemed to be progressing steadily with few setbacks. Some were impatient that progress was slow, but soon we held our election for the selection of members to represent the field on the Professional Board for Child and Youth Care, and this was another 'ladder'. Up and on we went.

The first inkling that things were not going to be as smooth as we thought occurred late last year, when a national conference organized by the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP), and the Department of Social Development was inaccessible to most child and youth care workers, and, despite its theme of interdisciplinary connection, focused primarily on social work as such. This indicates that child and youth care clearly still has a long way to go in taking a place as an 'equal' social service profession. A 'snake' to be sure!

But right now our profession is poised on the precipice of a long and dangerous 'snake' that could set us back on this journey. A document entitled "Service Delivery Model for Developmental Social Services" recently compiled by the Department of Social Development – the national department that is – seems to completely disregard previous benchmarks on the path of professionalisation of child and youth care, and limit the contribution of the field to "assistant personnel". One statement is cause for great alarm: "[t]here are other categories of personnel that *provide support services* to social service workers such as social auxiliary workers, child and youth care workers and other paraprofessionals. *Their functioning is defined within the context of social work*" (italics mine).

This document as it stands flies in the face of our acceptance by the SACSSP as a separate and autonomous occupational group. It flies in the face of the effort by so many in the field to obtain professional qualifications. It flies in the face of the respectable, professional and complex work being undertaken by so many child and youth care workers right now in the life-space of children, youth and their families. At a time in our country when we are deliberately creating opportunities for the development of a skilled work force, this policy (fortunately still in draft form) limits the long-held aspirations of our field towards professional standards of practice, recognition and status. If we are to journey on to achieve the level of recognition that we believe is necessary - in order to better serve children and youth - we must act now avoid a 'snake' of this sort. ●

A Draft copy of the Service Delivery Model for Developmental Social Services document can be downloaded from the website www.socdev.gov.za. Click on documents then 2004. Alternatively obtain the document from the Dept. of Social Development. Please send comments to Ms Bernice Hlagala, Director: Service Standards, National Department of Social Development. Contact details: Tel: 021- 3127430 Fax: 012-312 7573 or e-mail bernice.hlagala@socdev.gov.za - Nomathembe.kela@socdev.gov.za

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NACCW

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CHILD CARE WORKERS

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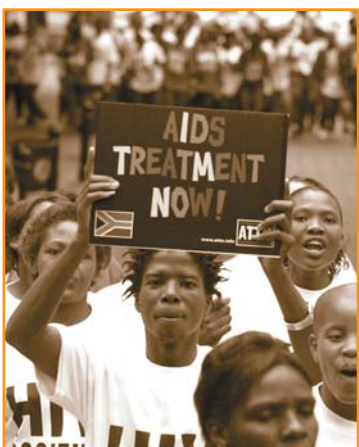
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