



Child & Youth Care

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

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**EX-GANG MEMBER WORKS
WITH YOUTH AT RISK**

**LARRY BRENDTRO REMEMBERS
ALAN KEITH LUCAS**

**THIRTY TWO YEARS IN THE
GUTTER DOES NOT MEAN
THE END OF HOPE**

A STRIKING NEW BOOK ON JUVENILE JUSTICE

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Editorial

Developmental, remedial, institutional (and other groot woorde) services for children and youth

There are some crucial debates on the go right now which will profoundly affect child and youth care services in this country. There is the debate over the big words above which describe differing approaches to welfare policies. There is the human resources debate over the training required by child and youth care workers. And there is the very concrete debate over the declining state subsidies for children whom the state has itself already found in need of special help.

Our own field

Our profession is entitled to participate in the wider debate on welfare policy in South Africa, and indeed does so at a number of levels. But it is *obliged* to participate in the narrower debate which directly affects our day-to-day work with young people in difficulties and at risk. We must never allow the big words to obscure the reality that a (relatively small, probably 0.07%) clearly identified group of people in this country do need the services of child and youth care workers. Midgely (1996.6) who advocates the appropriateness of the developmental model of social welfare for South Africa, acknowledges that "... there will always be a need for remedial social services." Child and youth care doesn't pretend to be involved beyond that need — although it has begun, in addition, to move beyond its institutional structures to contribute to both prevention and after-care services for at-risk youngsters.

Midgely goes on to suggest that even remedial services need to be developmental (in his social-economic sense) "by increasing opportunities for productive employment and self-employment among low income and special needs groups." This is no new idea to child and youth care, which, over the past ten to fifteen years, has strongly emphasised competence building in ecologically valid interventions. No respectable practice in child care today believes in free lunches, by promoting helplessness and dependency among welfare recipients. The UN Convention requires even for mentally and physically disabled children (Article 23) that

we promote "self-reliance and active participation in the community."

What we do know, however, and which is of relevance to the wider debate on welfare and economics, is that real problems not addressed effectively today will not go away, but will continue to be a far greater drain on the economy tomorrow.

Human resources

So what do we really need in the way of human resources to do all that? There is the extreme view that child and youth care workers do not really need more than the most basic training. There is a sense in which that is true. We do not need people with doctorates supervising breakfast, and we do not need elevated theoreticians in this work who cannot relate to kids and with whom the kids, in turn, cannot identify.

However, if we read the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child we shall see that competent child care staff come very high indeed on the agenda. As early as in Article 3 we read that "States Parties shall ensure that the institutions, services and facilities responsible for the care or protection of children shall conform with the standards established by competent authorities, particularly in the areas of safety, health, in the number and suitability of their staff, as well as competent supervision."

We have long passed the day where children's institutions and services are simply looking after poor children. Nobody doubts that

the young people referred to special agencies today have moved beyond mere indigency and neglect. It follows that apart from sufficient and competent on-line staff, there must be on hand, in any child care agency, someone who deeply understands the nature of the problems of the children and of the programmes in place to help with them — and this requires more than just basic training. Middle management, supervisors and heads of organisations most certainly require a more advanced level of training to be entrusted with their responsibilities.

But our profession has been demanding more than this. Why, we ask, should our inspectors, regional departmental officers, state administrators and executives always be social workers? Why should child and youth care professionals not also be represented at these levels? For this to be so, appropriate standards of education and training expected for these levels of service are required. Indeed, much of the legwork has already been done towards the establishing of a degree course in child and youth care.

We have worked hard at establishing the professional identity of the child and youth care worker. We have received the fullest possible support for this from within our own profession, from the Social Work Council, from UNISA and from most of our overseas colleagues. Professional behaviour is expected from us; we're doing our best to deliver.

Subsidies

On the understanding that a picture is worth a thousand words, we will allow the cartoon below (drawing with acknowledgements to Jock MacNeish of Australia) to express our opinions and feelings most accurately.

Midgely, J. The developmental perspective in social welfare: Transcending residual and institutional models. *Social Work Practice*, 1.96



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Cover Picture: Andrzej Sawa



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



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People



Zeni Thumbadoo

For the last six months Zeni has been involved in the Interministerial Committee on Young People at Risk. She was appointed as the National Pilot Project Co-ordinator for the Interim Committee. This has involved co-ordinating seven different pilot programmes nationally which are testing new aspects of the system to ensure that processes and programmes are appropriate, effective and efficient. These projects, should they be successful, will ultimately be incorporated in the policy document. "This has been a very exciting process for me as it has given me the opportunity to work at a national level with very interesting people, and it is always very challenging to create something new and innovative." She is also assisting in co-ordinating the setting up of nine secure care facilities around the country, one in each province. These have to be established urgently so as to contain those children awaiting trial who have committed serious crimes.

NACCW Involvement

In 1990 Zeni was elected as Regional Chairperson of the Natal Region of NACCW. She was intimately involved on a membership level and at the same time served on the National Executive Committee. She resigned from this position last year when she became a staff member

of NACCW, acting as co-ordinator for Project Upgrade in the Natal/Kwazulu Region, as well as training in the Behaviour Management and Core Concept courses. The feedback she has received is that the training has been going "exceptionally well and there have even been appreciative written responses from various facilities." One of the pilot projects for the IMC which Zeni initiated and is co-ordinating is the *Family Preservation* project in Inanda, Durban. This project has aimed to promote the philosophy of family preservation and to provide services for families. There are five programmes within this project:

- Intensive family support for families at risk of having children removed from their care). Experienced child care workers with training are being sought to become involved in this programme.
- Family group conferencing — which is a diversion programme for youth offenders.
- Community conferencing, leadership training which aims to create a caring community, reactivating traditional values.
- Family unification, where children are in out of home placements.
- Youth development programmes specifically targeting those at risk.

Zeni was the residential social worker at Lakehaven in Durban for from 1983 to 1993. She also has child care qualifications and is a professional child care worker. After leaving, she spent two years at Child Welfare as a control supervisor responsible for residential and social work programmes. She lives in Durban and is married with two children.