



# Child & Youth Care

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

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**NEW BOOK, NEW IDEAS  
ON STREET CHILDREN**

**TRANSFORMING AN  
OLD ORGANISATION**

**CHILD CARE WORKER  
SERVES AS A COURT  
INTERMEDIARY**

**NEW PICTURE STORY FEATURE: BACK TO SCHOOL**

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## Guest Editorial

# My Confusion, My Reality

*There are times when an editor knows that someone else will say far more eloquently the things he would like people to read. I have pleasure in making way this month for new child and youth care worker Mark Gamble.*

**F**ive months in the field of residential child and youth care, I stand in a maze of confusion. Thrown on the walls of this maze are a variety of images, pictures of experience, created through my work. Images good and bad ...

— of a child's rapt attention as he tries to catch a tadpole swimming in a mountain stream.

— of a youngster's face, filled with anger and frustration, as he shows you the only three photographs he has to represent the whole history of his life — all three of which his friend has scratched and written, in his own fury, the words "Fred's a mother f...cker".

— of kids coming back from school feeling bad having been told that *they* are the problem, and of the rage that follows, doors kicked in, fists and ugly words thrown, of dagga smoked and glue sniffed to ease the pain and the bitterness.

— of the burial and prayer for a dead pot plant, and its careful placement in the fishpond so as to form a "coral reef".

### Questions

Through these images, the questions are formed:  
Is that which is actually happening, what we're really supposed to be doing?

How do you create a therapeutic environment when the springs poke out of the mattresses, the doors are hanging on broken hinges — and the money isn't there to fix either?

How do you attempt a lifespace interview with one youth when 29 others are milling about, waiting for supper, doing jobs, laundry, showers, etc?

Which is more important to aim towards — containing the youth who needs your one-on-one time now, or running the system as a whole that maintains the other 29 kids?

How do you integrate the stunning theory of this profession with the practical realities, and how can you ever hope to do that, when you know that, on average, a child and youth care worker only lasts for three years in the profession?

### Fishpond

The analogy has come to my mind, this last week, of a fishpond. The kids that we work with are taken out of their own environments and thrown into our fishpond which is thought to be better for them. Then, in its own wisdom, our welfare system throws together in our pond all sorts and different types of fish/kids.

The "better and safer environment" of the fishpond is not always so. Each youngster is exposed to the behaviour of others, which can jeopardise his own coping and development, can heighten his confusion and wreck his self-esteem. As for the fishpond itself, it has many cracks, the water may be stale and short of nutrients and oxygen, harmful fungi might thrive there. All this threatens the lives and health of the "fish" — as well as those of the gardeners who look after the pond, those who were trained to care for the "fish" but without enough preparation for all of the realities of the pond.

### A better way

Does this sound all negative? Many are the nights when I go to bed feeling aggravated and frustrated with my work. The thought that ricochets around in my mind is that "there must be a better damn way to do what we are supposed to be doing."

### Some learning

So in the five months spent so far in my maze, with its images, frustrations and questions, I have come to know some things about child and youth care work:

— that the cornerstone of my work is the relationship I have with the youth in my care;  
— the need to be professional in my work, yet to keep in touch with the fact that I am human;  
— my need for on-going training and supervision;  
— my task is to create more positive's for the kids than negatives;

**"How do you integrate the stunning theory of this profession with the practical realities?"**

— to recognise the kids' vulnerability, and thus not to look for pointless conflict;  
— to use the hard times to learn, and the good times to inspire;  
— that there is no quick-fix model in this profession;  
— and that time off is time out — have another life!

I also know that in these five months in residential child and youth care, I have been engaged in a most real perspective of Life — and I am wonder-filled by the experience. ■

## In a manner of speaking ...

"True happiness, we are told, consists in getting out of one's self, but the point is not only to get out — you must stay out; and to stay out, you must have some absorbing errand."  
— Henry James

"Boredom will always remain the greatest enemy of school discipline. If we remember that children are bored, not only when they don't happen to be interested in the subject or when the teacher doesn't make it interesting, but also when certain working conditions are out of focus with their basic needs, then we realise what a great contributor to discipline problems boredom really is. Research has shown that boredom is closely related to frustration, and that the effect of too much frustration is invariably irritability, withdrawal, rebellious opposition, or aggressive rejection of the whole show."  
— Fritz Redl

"To do is to be"  
— Rousseau

"To be is to do"  
— Sartre

"Doobedoobedoo"  
— Sinatra

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*Cover Picture: Samuel Haberman*



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## People



**Roger Pitt**

Roger has been involved in child care for the past twenty years. He joined the Management Committee of the King Williams Town Children's Home in 1976 and in 1977 began a two-year stint as its Chairman. Then in 1979 he applied for the position of Principal and has been involved there ever since.

### Innovations

1979 was also the year in which the Home moved from its very poor old building to the new cottage home campus. This was but one of the innovations the home was to see in the years ahead. The small staff were already worried about the proposed number of 15 children to a cottage when they were encouraged by Frans Pieterse of the then Department of Social Welfare & Pensions to consider the possibility of group homes. The organisation bought two ordinary family homes in the town, and to this day they have proved to be a very valuable part of the child care programme.

The Home has also experienced the value of an Occupational Therapist on the staff, "with gratifying results", and after many years of part-time appointments, from 1996 they have a full-time OT on the team. The Home was also confronted by the difficulties of working with the children's families and communities while being located in

a country town, often far from the children's homes in East London and Port Elizabeth, yet they put in the time and the travelling to cover this important aspect of the work.

### Extra responsibilities

In 1989 Roger extended his work to include a consultancy to the East London Children's Home where he spent four days a week. At the end of that year the sisters at Woodlands Children's Home asked him to undertake a similar role there. A year later this children's home was given an additional site 18 km away, and its enrolment increased from 45 to 100 on the two properties. It was a great help to have Sarah Burger as his deputy at the King Williams Town campus.

### With NACCW

In 1992 Roger began a four-year stint as Assistant Director of the NACCW, based in Durban. However this was on the understanding that he should continue to spend one week in four in the Border Region, continuing his consultancy role with the two children's organisations. He felt a long-standing debt to the NACCW which had played an important role in the development of his staff team, and wanted to return something to the Association. In mid-1995, as the sisters withdrew, Woodlands was officially taken over as part of the King Williams Town Children's Home. To meet the subsidy shortfall for sixty children was hard enough, says Roger. Now we have to cover the costs of 160 — a far bigger job.

### Still in harness

As from January, Roger has returned to head up this large 160-bed organisation, while he continues in the role of Financial Administrator to the NACCW. ■