



Child & Youth Care

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**BUILDING TEAMS
THAT REALLY WORK**

**WAYS OF WORKING
WITH STREET CHILDREN**

**TERMS OF ENDEARMENT:
WHAT THE KIDS CALL US**

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

National Executive Committee

Chairman: Ashley Theron
BA (SW), BA (Hons), NHCRC.
MICC. Private Bag X2068
Mmbatho 8681. Phone
(0140) 89-9277. Fax 84-2727

Treasurer: Ernie
Nightingale NHCRC. Dip. IAC
(Bus. Admin). Dip. Pers. Man.,
AICB, AICC. P.O. Box 28119,
Malvern 4055. Phone:
031-44-6555. Fax: 44-6564

Members: Michael Gaffley
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(Border), Garth Ownhouse
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Cowley (Natal), Marie
Waspe (Transvaal)

Professional Staff

Director: Merle Allsopp BA,
HDE, NHCRC. 47 Kromboom
Rd, Rondebosch East 7764.
Tel: (021) 696-4247. Fax:
697-4123.
e-mail: naccwct@iafrica.com

Finance and Accounts:
Roger Pitt Dip. Theol., MICC.
P.O. Box 482, King Williams
Town 5600. Tel (0433)
25595. Fax 22252.
naccwct@iafrica.com

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

Liaison: Sibongile Manyathi
B.Soc.Sc. (Hons), P.O. Box
28323, Malvern 4055. Tel.
031-463-1033.
naccwdb@iafrica.com

UNISA Liaison: Jacqui
Winfield B.Soc.Sc., NHCRC.,
P.O. Box 28323, Malvern
4055. Tel. 463-1033.

Regional Secretaries

Transvaal: Gail Schultz, 26
Grant Ave, Norwood 2192.
Tel. 011-728-4277.

KwaZulu/Natal: Elizabeth
King, St Philomena's Home.
Telephone 031-28-4187

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

Western Cape: Dave Mac-
Namara, 3 Waterloo Rd,
Wynberg 7800. Tel 633-1892
Eastern Cape: Cecil Wood,
21 Kingfisher St, Cotswold
6045. Tel (041) 31-1760

Contacts in other areas

Suid-Kaap: Elwin Gallant,
Box 3591, George Industria
6536

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

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

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A tough choice for child and youth care workers

I have been paging through the two documents which make up the new Personnel Administration Standard (PAS) for our profession (referred to as the "Occupational Family: Care Personnel") issued by the Commission for Administration, which manages these things — job titles, task descriptions, salaries and such.

Two sections

There are two sections of the PAS for those who work in child and youth care settings. One is a "Social Auxiliary Worker" and the other is a "Child and Youth (Care) Worker". It seems that the "social auxiliary worker" represents the formative stage of the "child and youth (care) worker", though this is not made clear anywhere, and certainly the most striking feature of the PAS is that the two levels don't seem to meet anywhere — there is no continuity between them. The social auxiliary worker can progress (through levels 2 to 6) from a pupil social auxiliary worker through an ordinary social auxiliary worker, then a senior, then a principal, to a chief, and remain a social auxiliary worker for life. The child and youth (care) worker, on the other hand, emerges butterfly-like, ready-made (able to progress from level 6 to 11), with no prior developmental stages, on the sole strength of an "appropriate Bachelor's degree".

The social auxiliary worker

This term applies "to personnel who keep themselves busy with the execution of specialised tasks (of which the degree of complexity is of such a nature that specialised training is needed) either independently or by way of an auxiliary service to social professional officers (social workers, probation officers, child and youth (care) workers) and/or other skilled functionaries."

Appointment as a pupil social auxiliary worker requires a Junior Certificate and registration at the SA Council for Social Work — and apart from years of service (and a suggested qualification in Public Administration) nothing else is required for progression through the ranks to the highest post.

It seems that the generic term "social auxiliary worker" can be further subdivided to include the

following "domestic rank designations": community based care worker, auxiliary youth worker, auxiliary youth care worker, auxiliary child care worker, auxiliary probation officer and residential care worker.

The child and youth (care) worker

This term applies to personnel whose tasks include: assess client and programme needs, design and implement programmes and planned environments for children and youth, integrate developmental, preventive and therapeutic requirements into the life-space of children and youth, and participate in systems interventions through direct care of children and youth, supervision of personnel, administration, teaching, research, consultation and advocacy ... to promote the optimum holistic development of infants, children and youth with normal and/or special needs within the context of family, community and the life-span." This category of worker can advance from level 6 (child and youth care worker) through levels 7 and 8 (senior and chief) to levels 9 through 11 — Deputy Director: Child and Youth Care Services. There is mention of recognition for higher qualifications, even master's and doctoral degrees.

Place to grow

The advantages of this higher level PAS (child and youth care worker) is that for the first time in South Africa there is officially a recognisable job description for this work, and the opportunity for child care people to achieve senior rank within the state departments which administer child care organisations. It must be welcomed that the work of children's programmes and those who work in them may be inspected by people qualified in the field.

Particularly welcome is the recognition of degree level qualifications. The spade-work already achieved by so many students already having achieved the two-year UNISA Certificate in Child and Youth Care means that already there is a large number of potential students at the stage where they can continue with a degree in child and youth care. One hopes that the development of the degree is not far away.

Disempowering

I see few problems with the upper section of this new PAS. The serious problems in my view are with the social auxiliary worker section.

1. The low entry level (Junior Certificate) coupled with the lack of specified training and qualification for progression through the ranks, does not "grow" workers.
2. The job title "auxiliary" is disempowering and, at the higher levels, confusing. A senior or chief auxiliary is a contradiction in terms. After seven years in the field one might expect to have grown beyond the auxiliary status.
3. The overwhelming majority of workers in our field are staff at this "auxiliary" level. Until now, people with a two-year child care qualification, two years' experience in the field and commitment to a code of ethics could register and hold their heads up and call themselves child and youth care workers.

More to the point, when the next difficult kid is referred to a programme, a kid whom teachers, psychologists and welfare workers have been unable to stabilise and help, he will be handed over to a staff member with a very particular set of knowledge and skills — and it is crucial that this staff member feels a sense of empowerment and respect for this serious responsibility.

It is also important that this worker is supervised by someone from the same profession, who understands the nature of the work. As one worker said to me: "I must now register under this new PAS which demands so little and gives so little — I think I would prefer to retain my present level of registration which at least acknowledges my efforts, is strong on ethics, and is clear on my task and skill areas. It's a tough choice!"

CYC-net

This is a new international e-mail network for child and youth care, which has been established by the NACCW. An e-mail request to cyc-net@iafrica.com will put you on-line to a direct link with colleagues in the profession — world-wide. From then on, your serious child and youth care information and questions are fed to the e-mail of all on the CYC-net network.

See details of CYC-net on <http://os2.iafrica.com/naccw>

Get connected

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Cover Picture: Andrzej Sawa



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Editorial Advisory Board: Merle Allsopp BA, HDE, NHCRC; Annette Cockburn LTCL, Dip.Ad.Ed.(UCT); Kathy Mitchell BA; Pumla Mncayi BA (SW); Adv. Anne Skelton, United Kingdom; Peter Harper MSc (Clinical Psychology); United States: Dina Hatchuel BSocSc (SW) (Hons) PSW MSocSc. **Editor:** Brian Gannon

People



Sr Irene Maher, tells in her soft-spoken accent of her past — of growing up in a loving family in County Meath near Dublin, and how she has always striven to give children in her care this same feeling of love and security. Leaving her convent school she trained in nursery nursing doing her practical placement with the Sisters of Nazareth — the beginning of her long relationship with the Order.

At 18, much to the surprise of her parents, she decided to take her vows, turning down a post in America at the same time. With her training she was given the task, for ten years, of running a residential nursery for abandoned children. While in Cardiff she did an in-service course in child care after which she was released to do a full-time child care course at college. Here she was thrown in at the deep end in having to do her practicals in state institutions with difficult children. The students were mostly men and it was here, while supporting her colleagues at matches, that Sr. Irene learnt to enjoy rugby, she admits with a laugh. She was also introduced to mountaineering, still a great love. On completion of her course she became Principal of a home in Northern Ireland, then spent six happy years as Principal of Westwood, a home in Northampton. Then, after two years at a home for thirty children in Swansea, she was asked, in 1981, to come to South Africa.

She admits that at first she was desperately homesick, but thanks to the likes of Joy Hansen, Brian Gannon and Di Levine and her involvement with NACCW, she was able to settle and meet others in the field. From 1983 to 1985 she served on the Transvaal Executive of the NACCW. 1989 saw her transfer to Nazareth House in Cape Town. In 1992 she started the Diploma in Child Care Administration (DCCA) course. In the middle of this she was once more transferred to Gauteng where she was elected Mother Superior at Nazareth House in Pretoria. After only five months she was back in Cape Town as Mother Superior. Through all of this she managed to complete her DCCA course, which has been a great help. Always keen to broaden her knowledge, Sister Irene has just completed a clinical pastoral education programme in Pietermaritzburg, which she found most valuable as it focused on listening skills as well as examining in depth one's own fears and perceptions of illness, death and dying. Nazareth House in Cape Town is being altered to accommodate more AIDS orphans and physically disabled children. The facilities for the elderly are being upgraded at the same time.

This quotation from Mahatma Gandhi is very close to Sr Irene's heart. "*Prayer as an expression of truth and gratitude is the key both for evening and for morning prayer. In the morning it opens our life to the light ...*"

Sr Irene feels it is vital to be able to meet the problems and challenges of each new day, and to use whatever resources one has, and not to compare people and places. The peace and serenity which is Sr Irene, have touched many who have come under her care and guidance. ■

Nicholas Long helps us understand why adults strike back.

Dealing with our own Counteraggression

Those who work with troubled youth do not begin the day by saying, "I'd better schedule some time this afternoon to be sarcastic to Sarah, to yell at Sam, to threaten Sylvia, and to smack Seymour." Yet, staff frequently find themselves in counteraggressive struggles with their students. How do we explain adult counteraggression when our intentions are to help troubled students, not fight them? Is counteraggression a function of personal inadequacies, a lack of self-control, a derivative of early child-rearing experiences? Or is counteraggression a biological "instinct" that all humans possess?

Psychologists are guided by the principle that a biological explanation of behaviour has priority over any psychological interpretation of behaviour. For example, we are born into this world with powerful instincts, drives, and impulses that have been refined over thousands of years to guarantee the survival of our species. The drive to seek food by stalking and killing animals made us predators. The needs for water, shelter, and an available source of new gene pools made us assailants, rapists, and conquerors. Similarly, the need to protect our lives, families, food supplies and properties made us counteraggressive.

The skill and strength of being counteraggressive guaranteed that primitive humans could survive another day. It became an asset; and over the centuries, the law of the jungle was replaced by the law of the land. Counteraggression was reinterpreted as a necessary act of self-protection and self-preservation against attacks by barbarians, invaders, and assassins. Walled cities and formidable castles were built to withstand any siege. Stockades were constructed along critical waterways to protect new settlements. And after World War II, the policy of the large nations was to be prepared militarily at all times and to let every nation

know that there would be a massive retaliation against any attack.

Counteraggression can be seen in a nation's armies and a town's police force. It has become so much a part of the fabric of our society that it is difficult to recognize how counteraggression has shaped our thinking and attitudes. Currently, we applaud politicians and police, who are tough on criminals. We would like them to solve our fears of being a victim in the same counteraggressive ways in which our military forces have dealt with our foreign enemies: "Let's punish them!" The biological instinct for counteraggression exists in all of us. Perhaps even in our DNA.

Looking Beyond the Simple Solution of Punishment

We all wish for a psychological aspirin to relieve our worries and pains. We would like someone else to solve the problem of violence in our society. We want the police, the courts, and the prisons to do their jobs and to protect us from criminals. However, there is one area where we can influence aggressive behaviour; that is to learn how to control our own counteraggressive actions.

The number one reason for the increase in student violence in schools is staff counteraggression. While staff do not initiate student aggression, they react in ways that perpetuate it. Staff counteraggression is a complex issue. It is part of our history. It is part of our society. But counteraggressive acts should not be a part of our helping process with troubled children and youth. Fritz Redl (1966), in his study of delinquent youth, was among the first psychologists to write about staff counteraggression. He described the underlying reasons why staff become counteraggressive. I have taken his creative concepts and have expanded them for the next generation of professional helpers.

Seven Reasons Why Adults Become Counteraggressive

1. Counteraggression is a reaction to being caught in the student's conflict cycle.

The most frequent reason for reasonable staff to behave aggressively toward troubled students is that staff become caught in the dynamics of the student's conflict cycle. About 50% of staff's counteraggressive behaviour can be explained by this cycle.

The conflict cycle describes the circular and escalating behaviour between a young person and a staff member during a conflict. It teaches one of the most important principles of interpersonal behaviour.

When a youngster is in stress, his emotions will echo in the adult. If the adult is not trained to own and to accept his or her counteraggressive feelings, the adult will act on them and mirror the youngster's behaviour. This means an aggressive student will always create counteraggressive feelings in the adult. Whenever adults act on these feelings, do what seems normal, and follow their impulses, the situation will become more emotional, irrational, and volatile. For example, when a student yells at a teacher and says, "I'm not going to do it!" the normal impulse and desire are to yell back, "Yes, you will do it!" Once this happens, the conflict cycle escalates.

During the heat of this battle, the staff member frequently refuses to back down or to acknowledge his or her role in furthering the crisis. The adult becomes locked into a rigid pattern of thinking, feeling, and behaving and tries to break down the door of the student's resistance. The professional term for this adult behaviour is "Retaliatory Resistance." The adult retaliates because he or she has internalized the student's aggressive feelings; and instead of using them as a diagnostic indicator of what the student is feeling, the adult acts on