

editorial



Cliff Picton

One of the functions of this Journal is to present a range of critical views of current policy and practice in child and family welfare. This issue contains a wealth of critical comment which should add to the debate in several significant policy areas. The three main articles deal with adoption, itself a matter of considerable public interest and debate at the present time in view of possible changes in the law relating to access by adopted persons to information about their origins.

In publishing Judge Forster's judgement in Freddie's case we recognise the complexities surrounding domicile of prospective adopters and the best interests of the child. Turner's comments on the judgement back up Forster's awareness of the significance of the "culture factor" in adoption. This in itself is a contentious issue. Judge Forster has expressed an interest in hearing people's views on the judgement and I will be glad to pass on any received by the Journal.

The papers by Close, and Calder and Kiel take a hard look at adoption practice, the former from an academic the latter from an experiential perspective. Close is particularly concerned about the validity of the criteria used in the selection of adoptive parents and presents an alternative model based on a reinterpretation of social work principles. Calder and Kiel's small study of the reactions of adoptive

parents to the assessment is a welcome (and overdue) contribution to knowledge. The social work profession has been slow to ask for feedback from the users of its services, thus leaving itself open to serious questioning, and at times, some pretty hysterical criticism. We know that there are many things wrong with current practice and it is therefore interesting to note the positive responses in this study. Above all it shows us that there are many valuable insights to gain from this kind of research. I would be glad to hear of any other similar studies.

The Report of the Child Maltreatment Workshop reviewed by Matthews contains many implied criticisms of us all for failing to set up adequate machinery for the detection and prevention of child abuse. The response of the Victorian Government, whose Health Department was actively involved in the Workshop, has been less than satisfactory. This Report is the latest in a series presented to the State Government in recent years. It is to be hoped that its comprehensive recommendations will be acted on and not quietly pigeonholed. It is a sobering thought that

while we debate pros and cons the lives of defenceless children are at risk and battering parents, urgently in need of counselling and support, remain trapped in a vicious circle of violence. Further critical material is presented in Bignell's Letter to the Editor where she takes to task the authors of "Some Children at Risk in Victoria in the 19th Century" for their interpretation of historical data. One of the hazards of authorship is the selective use (in other people's eyes) of data that appear straightforward and non controversial. Whoever is right, it is a compliment to any author that an article is read with such meticulous concern for accuracy. A most welcome addition to the Journal is Richard Chisholm's legal column which will be a regular feature. His pungent comments and ability to explain the law, in all its incomprehensible majesty, in simple language, should prove popular as well as instructive.

For the next two issues the Editor will be "at large" in Asia and Europe. I hope to use this opportunity to include some overseas contributions in addition to the steadily increasing flow of Australian material. My own observations on how other countries organise their child and family welfare services will hopefully contribute to the continuing debate as well as perhaps adding fuel to the fires of controversy.