

## Editorial

**T**his issue is the final one in the International Year for the World's Indigenous Peoples. Coming, in 1994, is the International Year of the Family. Both mark subjects of fundamental concern for this journal which has practitioners, service providers and students of child and family welfare at the core of its readership.

History provides ample testimony to the fact that indigenous people have been marginalised, disproportionately disadvantaged, dispossessed of land and culture and dramatically overrepresented in 'welfare' and 'correctional' systems. Systems, which in the minds of their designers and operators, intend to protect the best interests of children and society at large, yet so often, when seen with the hindsight of history, can turn out to be misguided in philosophy and punitive and destructive in their effects.

One would hope that the special focus provided in a declared International Year would inspire the necessary reflection, research and action to address wrongs, to chart new directions and to give impetus to meaningful reforms. Has this been so for Australia's Aboriginal children in 1993? Can it be said that things will never be as bad as they have been in the past? – that new awareness and new directions are enlightened, productive and enriching for Aboriginal people and Australian Society as a whole? Some momentous issues have progressed through the year, bringing to the surface both ugly and noble sentiment. The Mabo decision and ensuing legislation, still the subject of heat and controversy, yet marking in law a fundamental change. The formal agenda of reconciliation, again not free of controversy, but marking movement beyond good intent and embodying important ideals. The percolation of the awareness raised in the Inquiry into Deaths in Custody, through the justice systems in each state, has shown up many shortcomings in our systems for protecting people and correcting social ills. Beyond these 'bit ticker' items with their

tortured passages, there is a sense of movement and enrichment coming from the hands and voices of many people working away in their own place and communities of interest. A sense of discovery is at large about culture and heritage. Music and art are enriched and Australian Society stands to gain from a new resonance with a history of 40,000 years, a new appreciation of the delicate balances, nuances and fruits of this land. The Australian identity of the future must include a respect for these things and see and hear the wisdom of Aboriginal leaders and teachers articulating these things.

In this issue some of the Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agencies from around Australia have said a few things about ideas and events in their place.

One important common issue for both indigenous people and for families concerns the way in which the Australian society manages and distributes its resources. The political economy has shifted dramatically away from the 'welfare state'. With the shift comes the need for a new appreciation of economic and social goals. To what does our society aspire? What behaviour is rewarded or supplied with wages, fees or benefits in cash or kind? What kind of Cathedrals will we build in this age? Will they be for us alone or will they include the interests of our children and future generations? Will they celebrate human need, survival, morality, equity, dignity and communality – a responsive, safe, supportive and caring community – or will they reflect dominant or narrow individual or sectarian interests, the grabbing of power and resources and their application to greed and exploitation? The International Year of the Family provides another important opportunity to rejig our thinking.

A dominant thrust in health, education and welfare is tighter targeting of services and the withdrawal of government as a direct service provider. The powerful push to greater efficiency, justified by policies of debt reduction and retirement in

a recessed global economy, is often being achieved by the simple withdrawal of funds. Percentage reductions, simple defunding or new funding formulae, such as casemix in hospitals, will in some instances generate real and productive innovation. Our concern relates to services for children. How will the critically important role of parenting and the protective and supportive roles performed by families, schools and community-based health and welfare agencies be financed? Are households to be seen as consumers, producers or both? Who pays who, how much and for what form of protection from ignorance, exploitation and illness? Are these things in the province of self sufficient individuals, households or communities? Are they items for barter and trade in kind through self help or mutual aid groups? Are they matters of charity or philanthropy? Are they issues for 'not for profit' sector? Are they matters for commerce? Are they part of 'corporate citizenship'? Hopefully some of these questions will gather some answers in the Year of the Family.

Contributors to this issue highlight much of what underlies our concern for children and their families. We have included 'The Family Challenge', produced by Dr Don Edgar, as he retires from a most productive period as Director of the Australian Institute of Family Studies. The wealth of information gained through the Institute's Research Program must guide the ongoing development of public policy. Dorothy Scott has provided a penetrating analysis of obstacles in the way of interagency collaboration, giving at the same time some useful insights in child protection.

Phillip Slee shares some useful research into bullying at school – an important topic which is only now getting the serious consideration it deserves. The need for productive intervention strategies is important for the longer term well-being of both bullied and bully. The economic push to return to larger class sizes is likely to exacerbate such problems. David Mellor and Shane Storer describe an interesting approach to a Family Life Education Program which has been well received in practice. Jill Volard, Chris Baxter and Cliff Da Costa report on a study of recruitment options for out-of-home caregivers for children with intellectual disability. It is

apparent that many traditional child welfare agencies have in recent years become more involved with children with disabilities. This raises important concerns about the ability to provide appropriate quality care and issues to do with the support for family members providing care. Recruitment approaches which achieve sufficient quality and quantity of caregivers are an ongoing challenge for agencies. The former president of the National Children's Bureau, Neville Turner and Chris Laughton report on a brief study of school children's perceptions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It draws attention to the need for children and young people to become more closely acquainted with the Convention, something which should be more prominent on the agenda of parents, teachers, political, business and community leaders. As 1993 ends, the lot of far too many children has not improved, for some it is horrific. The Convention points to important social goals which should underpin political, social and economic policy, business ethics, media behaviour and any legislative and judicial decision making in any country.

Chris Goddard continues in this issue, the story of one family's struggle with child abuse in an educational institution. Children simply must be protected from exploitation and abuse and such stories must be heard. Chris does much to facilitate our ability to hear.

As we wish you well for the new year we draw your attention to the NCBA's connection with a new organisation called Oz Child : Children Australia, formed from a merger of Family Action and Family Focus and the NCBA. The National Children's Bureau continues to operate as a division of Children Australia, concerned with information, research and advocacy.

June Allan, the Book Review Editor, would be pleased to hear from readers who have encountered useful new books, videos, etc. and who would be willing to write a review or suggest material for review.

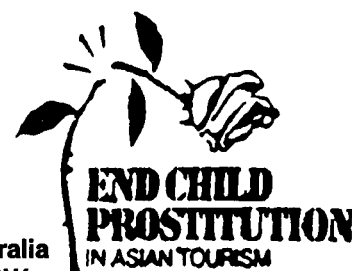
*Lloyd Owen*  
Editor

## ECPAT

**Table 1 Human Rights Groups Estimates of Child Prostitutes**

| Country       | Estimated No. of Child prostitutes | Population | Child prostitute/ Population ratio |
|---------------|------------------------------------|------------|------------------------------------|
| Brazil        | 250,000                            | 158.2m     | 1:632                              |
| India         | 400,000                            | 886.3m     | 1:2215                             |
| Philippines   | 60,000                             | 67.1m      | 1:1118                             |
| Sri Lanka     | 30,000                             | 17.6m      | 1:586                              |
| Thailand      | 200,000–800,000                    | 57.6m      | 1:144                              |
| United States | 90,000–300,000                     | 255.6m     | 1:1704                             |

(WFMH committee on the commercial sexual exploitation of children, August 27, 1993.  
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Contact the national office if you would like to be active in the National or State ECPAT campaigns. There's plenty of work to be done.