

**Book Review Editor
Ruth Stewart**



public investment) were encouraged to use day nurseries and go back to work. For the others, the doctrine of maternal deprivation was called on to justify the lack of day care and the need for them to stay at home with their children.

The more enlightened provisions implemented in Sweden make impressive reading. There is one ministry in Sweden for all pre-school services. (In Victoria Federal, State and municipal bodies share these responsibilities.) Recent legislation gave all Swedish parents the right to a 6 hour working day until a child is 8 years old or full leave of absence until a child is 18 months. This leave may be shared by two parents. While a child is under 10 either parent is entitled to 12 days leave a year (15 days for two children) for the illness of a child or non-working parent. The aim is to provide nurseries for all working parents by 1986.

The rich, it is explained, have always been able to "buy help to protect themselves from the realities of child care, and many still do". There is the example of Lady Russell, who in 1977 took a rest cure in a health hydro at £120 a week. "I have had such a tiring time since the birth of my daughter, Czarina, last year. Two months ago both my nanny and the Filipino couple I had, left me. As a result I had to do everything on my own. Imagine going shopping taking a child with you in a pushchair. And everytime you go out in the car you have all the business of fixing the safety harness. By 6.30 in the evening I was finished . . . When I get home I hope to get another couple, and in the meantime, my father-in-law's valet is going to help in the house." (p.74)

For the rest of us, however, "bringing up young children carries with it a heavy burden of work and responsibility; which in our society is borne almost exclusively by mothers. It extracts from many of them a heavy toll—physically, psychologically and economically. The case for day centres at its most basic is that they provide one means of sharing

this heavy burden so reducing the overload on women and its damaging consequences."

For those who would like to see responsibilities for home and children shared more equally between men and women and the rest of society, this book offers practical hope.

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Two replies to 'Annie's Coming Out'

**From Sue Jones
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J.M. Houston's review of "Annie's Coming Out" (in *Australian Child and Family Welfare Journal*, Winter, 1981) itself calls for further review. Your readers should be made aware that it contains many disputed and disputable statements of both fact and interpretation, while raising vital issues.

In this critique six of the disputed factual statements will be addressed, mainly with the use of information from the book, which could be substantiated from other sources. The present writer has not had access to the Supreme Court records of the hearing in May and September, 1979, or recent access to the Report of the Committee of Inquiry to Investigate Claims About Children at St Nicholas' Hospital (S.N.H.), April, 1980.

Anne McDonald identifies herself and is identified in the book (page 1) as suffering from the athetoid form of cerebral palsy or athetosis, not bilateral hemiplegia and athetosis as stated in the review (paragraph 1). This matter was the subject of considerable medical dispute (see book pp.210-11 and 214, and presumably the Court records), and is most relevant because of the different prognostic implications.

The statement in paragraph 3 "Miss Crossley believes that she (Miss McDonald) is able to communicate with

her with the aid of an alphabet board" is not disputed, but is regarded as a significant understatement. Anne's communication abilities, including her use of the alphabet board, are recognised clearly by a far wider circle including a Master of the Supreme Court (Sept., 1979). This second Court hearing and associated investigation certainly did produce further evidence of Anne's ability to communicate independently, in contrast to the reviewer's statement (paragraph 17). This is described in the book (pp.238-42). The investigation included, eventually, a briefly controlled "test" with the alphabet board. The letter R is on the opposite side to S and T, and there was no piece of string to glance at.

It is inaccurate to claim that Miss Crossley, through Miss McDonald's lawyers, refused Mr Justice Jenkinson's attempt to organise a controlled test during the first Supreme Court hearing (para. 12). Her barrister withdrew from the arrangements after becoming aware of potential delay and an additional requirement that Miss Crossley wear a blindfold, which would have made the test situation untenable (p.223).

With regard to the abrupt restrictions imposed on non-relative visiting at S.N.H. in early 1979 (para. 21), the phrase "in danger of becoming a circus attraction" is considered a misrepresentation of responsible actions by previously welcome visitors trying to maintain contact with resident friends, including those of adult age. These restrictions are still in force. The concern and interests of the parents involved could have been more effectively faced by the hospital administration. Restrictions in visiting at S.N.H. are discussed at some length in the Supplementary Report to the Committee of Inquiry to Investigate Claims about Children at St Nicholas' Hospital, August 1981, by Robert Cummins and Heather Bancroft (pp. 167-186).

Still with regard to visiting, the



reviewer's comments within paragraph 21 apparently argue the legitimacy of the restrictions imposed. The appropriateness of the Health Commission's refusal to permit Miss McDonald private access to her Solicitor in February, 1979 and subsequent refusal of any access to him is disputed. Mr Justice Jenkinson's finding (May 1979), that the Solicitor had been properly instructed, belatedly established Miss McDonald's right to this access.

The final factual statement disputed in this critique is in paragraph 23—that no evidence is produced to support the claim that there are children in S.N.H. who are not severely retarded. This ignores the claim that Miss McDonald, herself, the book of which she is co-author, together with the legal actions described, stand as evidence in relation to one ex-resident. Contrary evidence is cited in the Report of the Committee of Inquiry, but in using this the reviewer ignores serious criticisms of the methods and findings of the Inquiry. This criticism has been expressed publicly and carefully documented in the Supplementary Report to the Committee.

Other statements within the review which could be addressed critically include: "No child has been heard to speak in S.N.H." (paragraph 8), "Her (Miss Crossley's) sincerity was not questioned" (paragraph 11), and that Miss Crossley does not ask Miss McDonald to "even" indicate a yes or no response before witnesses (paragraph 18). It is also highly unlikely that in a book written for general readers any evidence would be given to support serious allegations about staff (paragraph 26).

J.M. Houston maintains a scepticism about Miss McDonald's communication throughout the review, expressed in terms such as "believes she is able to communicate" (paragraph 3) and "what is actually happening" (paragraph 9). In her final paragraph she addresses the very real problems for family and staff

caring for profoundly mentally and physically handicapped people, including the "problematic place of hope". She concludes:

"For nursing and teaching staff must find themselves in the paradoxical position of somehow acting as if they believe in growth and development, being ever ready to see it if it occurs, but seeing potential as irrelevant to their care and commitment."

The reviewer refers to Miss Crossley's consideration whether she might unconsciously influence Miss McDonald's use of the alphabet board (p.109) (paragraph 9). She then goes on to propose:

"Could it be that like all of us she finds it impossible to look into a bright happy little face and face the reality of profound mental damage?"

An even-handed sceptic might explore a similar mechanism in relation to the strong resistance to recognising Miss McDonald's and the other S.N.H. youngsters' communication. Could it be that so many of us find it impossible to look at a severely handicapped and "speechless" person, and face the reality of undeveloped intellectual, social and emotional potential? The lapel badge "I'm handicapped not stupid" is an important and needed reminder. It is not easy to be "ever ready to see (growth and development) if it occurs".

J.M. Houston comments upon the influence of the unconscious wishes of those caring for severely handicapped people (paragraph 9) and commonly held beliefs and fantasies about institutions for the retarded (paragraph 20). This opens the wider issues of the influence of belief, fantasy and unconscious wishes on attitudes toward physical, mental and communication handicap. Although beyond the scope of either the book review or this critique, these matters are of vital importance to the issues involved.

In discussing Miss McDonald's Habeas Corpus action, the reviewer shows concern that the Health

Commission had little time to prepare its case, and that judgement could not be deferred until the about to commence Inquiry tabled its findings. An even-handed sceptic might find this fortunate, as the report was tabled over 11 months later, and has been qualified by serious public and professional criticism since its publication (Supplementary Report). Eleven months is a long time in the life of an institutionalised eighteen-year-old. Miss McDonald had already been waiting two years since her developing communication was first reported to the hospital administration.

J.M. Houston makes little mention of the youngsters to whom the book is dedicated, the other members of the S.N.H. "Communication Group" who are also the subjects of "Annie's Coming Out". These youngsters have subsequently been the subjects of the Committee of Inquiry and the Supplementary Report, and remain the focus of a continuing dispute as to their various communication abilities, their need for more appropriate residential, treatment and educational facilities, and their civil rights.

In her inaccurate and unduly sceptical review, J.M. Houston questions the credibility and capacities of the two co-authors, to their personal distress. The ten remaining youngsters are, however, the individuals most vulnerable to attacks on Miss Crossley's and Miss McDonald's credibility, and it is in their interests in particular that this critique is offered.

No matter how broad, complex and at times conflicting our responsibilities to the handicapped in institutional care, to their families, and to the staff who care for, educate and treat them, the interests of the residents themselves must remain the primary focus of our concern.