

comments

One of the tasks of this section of the Journal will be to provide for comment and discussion on current events in the fields of social policy, welfare and administration. By bringing together news, information and comments from all over Australia it is hoped to give readers an opportunity to compare and contrast their services with those provided elsewhere. Apart from any other gains this will help to counteract any tendencies towards parochialism which might stem from the State system. We would like to hear about the impact of new legislation, about innovations in service provisions, and particularly about the progress of any research projects. From time to time we also hope to include comments from people who use social services as we believe that all too frequently they are denied a public platform.

COMMITTEE OF ENQUIRY INTO CHILD CARE SERVICES IN VICTORIA

Late in 1974 the Premier of Victoria, the Honorable R. J. Hamer, M.L.A., appointed a Committee to enquire into Child Care Services in this State.

The composition of that Committee is as follows:

Chairman: Mr Maurice Brown, LL.B. (until 31/7/75), Mr John Norgard, B.E. (from 1/8/75).

Members: Mr William Davey, B.A., Dip.Soc.Stud., Mrs Shirley Horne, B.Com., Miss Elizabeth Sharpe, Mr K. Slattery.

With the exception of Mr Davey who represents the Social Welfare Department, members of the Committee do not represent individual agencies. Miss Sharpe and Mrs Horne have wide professional experience in a number of relevant welfare fields, while Mr Norgard, in addition to his role in the Enquiry, is Chairman of the Metric Conversion Board and Deputy Chancellor of La Trobe University. Research and administration facilities have been made available by the Social Welfare Department.

The Terms of Reference laid down for the Committee are both specific and general. They are:

“The Committee will investigate and, where necessary, make recommendations in respect of:

1. The facilities needed to care for Wards of the State and other children requiring full time care apart from their families.

2. The provisions necessary for registering voluntary organisations involved in residential and foster family care for children.

3. What preventive facilities and services will avoid the need for children to be removed from family care.

4. The procedures whereby children are admitted to the care of the Social Welfare Department, and whether alternatives to wardship should be provided in cases where protective intervention is necessary

5. The staff and facilities needed to implement new policies.

6. The extent to which facilities should be provided by the Social Welfare Department and/or by voluntary organisations.

7. The cost, financial priorities and best methods of implementing programmes”.

As can be seen from the Terms of Reference, the Committee has a wide range of responsibilities. In the first place, the Committee is required to examine the existing legal, administrative and residential provisions for children who are in the guardianship of the Director General of Social Welfare or are placed privately in children's homes, and to make what recommendations for change it considers appropriate. Secondly it is to recommend what services and facilities may be required to reduce the number of children removed from parents' care. Finally, it is to estimate the staff, training programmes and funds which it considers necessary to implement any changes it recommends, and the relative parts to be played by voluntary and statutory organisations.

Inside the framework imposed by its terms of reference, the Committee expects to have a reasonably flexible *modus operandi*. It has advertised for submissions from interested organisations and individuals, both inside and outside Victoria, and is particularly interested in receiving material from people who have themselves been inmates of children's homes or foster homes. It has not held public hearings, but has drawn some of its material from discussions as well as written evidence. Members also have travelled widely to see various organisations at work. Wherever possible, existing Victorian practices and suggested alternatives are being assessed in the light of developments in other Australian States and relevant countries abroad. Interstate trips have been made.

How does this enquiry compare with the activities of similar, earlier, bodies? Here, it is worth noting that major investigations into Victoria's child welfare system have been held only infrequently.

The first enquiry, which took the form of a Royal Commission, was convened in 1872 and examined the system of congregate child care then operated by the Neglected Children's Department. It

condemned the system outright and recommended that the State should refrain from operating any children's institutions other than a central receiving house. From this point dated the arrangement which lasted until the mid-1950's, in which the State authorities depended entirely on private individuals and voluntary organisations to care for its children in institutions or foster homes.

During the late 1950's and early 1960's, statutory and voluntary organisations both displayed increased interest in issues of child welfare and juvenile delinquency. Since then there have been three statutorily-sanctioned enquiries into general and specific areas and one major, published academic report. In historical order, these were as follows:

Firstly, the Juvenile Delinquency Advisory Committee was set up by the Chief Secretary of Victoria in 1955 under Mr Justice Barry. It studied the Victorian trends in juvenile crime and tried to assess factors causing delinquency. A wide range of recommendations to aid in the reduction and treatment of delinquency emerged, a number of which have been implemented.

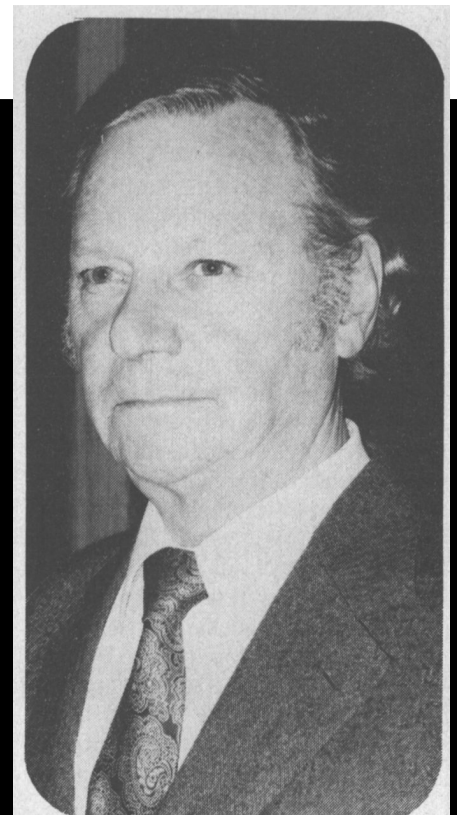
commodate those who had been admitted, deliberated for two years and reported in 1964. A total of 44 conclusions and recommendations were produced. These basically stressed the need for improved services to prevent children's admission to substitute care, and for overall improvement in the standards and types of residential care available for those children who were admitted. Overall, the committee concluded that existing child care facilities were overtaxed, and that greatly increased financial resources would be necessary to meet future admissions.

The academic study carried out by Mr L. Tierney of Melbourne University and published as "Children Who Need Help" (Melbourne University Press 1963), resulted from Mr Tierney's researches into Victoria's child welfare policies and administration. While developing some historical perspective, it concentrated on the years 1960-62. It is notable as investigating for the first time the sociological and personal characteristics of children in statutory care, their relationships with natural families, and the types of care provided by the organisations responsible for them. Overall Mr

this end it has encouraged the receipt of submissions from major organisations in all States and in both the voluntary and statutory fields. It also has sought comments and suggestions from people who actually work as child care staff or as foster parents, or who just have a general interest in the field. Finally, it has encouraged comments from people who themselves have been inmates of children's homes or foster homes, or whose own children have been through the same experience.

Present plans are for the Committee to produce a report of its findings in mid-1976.

Donna Jaggs,
Research & Administrative Officer to the
Committee.



Mr John Norgard, Chairman, Committee of Enquiry into Child Care Services in Victoria.