GUEST EDITORIAL

Lloyd Owen, B.A. Dip. Soc. Studies, M.Soc.Wk.

Lloyd Owen spent a large part of his own youth and early adulthood engaged in Presbyterian youth work and welfare work. He also spent time earning a living in the insurance industry picking up the pieces after motor car and industrial accidents, being a part-time soldier and, with his wife Faye, a foster parent. He joined the staff of the then Social Welfare Department in 1968 and after graduating in Social Work from Melbourne University in 1972, has occupied management positions in Victorian Youth Training Centres and central Reception Centres. He completed post graduate qualifications in Social Work at Monash University in 1982. Currently he is Supervisor of Reception and Youth Training Centres in the Department of Community Services, natural parent of three teenagers, President of the management committee of the Nunawading Youth Adult Bureau (a local community based drop-in), occasional lecturer in courses for social workers and welfare workers and a member of several committees associated with the welfare field.

In 1979 the United Nations general Assembly designated 1985 as International Youth Year. It recognised a need for the global community to reassess and adjust its position in respect of Youth Affairs. Being young is a state, life stage and state of mind through which all who achieve

adulthood pass. Perhaps this experience leads to the comparisons which give rise to terms such as the "generation gap" and the "alienated generation" being coined. IYY is a timely event as it seems that the conjunction of baby booms working their way through the demographic structure and the advent of other major socio-economic events have placed immense obstacles and new strains in the way of young people fulfilling their aspirations and making their way in the world.

Australian Child and Family Welfare proposes to give a special focus to youth in this and some subsequent issues. The editor is therefore inviting those with interest or involvement in the lives of young people to submit material for publication.

In the lead up to and during the earlier part of 1985 a number of significant developments have occurred having a bearing on the position of young people in Australia. The Youth Affairs Council of Australia was established in 1979/80 and has extended its activity through and on behalf of its four member forums:

The National Youth Council of Australia (NYCA);

The National Forum of State Youth Affairs Council (NFSYAC);

The Conference of Australian Youth Organisations (CAYO); and

The Nationwide Workers with Youth Forum (NWWYF).

On a commission from the Federal Government YACA undertook a Nationwide Youth Policy Consultation and the report "Creating Tomorrow Today" was launched in July, 1983. The consultation report tapped both the idealism and the sense of alienation and powerlessness of many young people in a world where aspirations have been climbing while access for many has been declining. A call was made for policy and empowerment through access to new forms of organisation; knowledge and skills; and productive assets. A conference in Melbourne in September, 1984 called "Making it Happen" welded many of these ideas to the three themes of IYY, participation, development and peace and called for action strategies in respect to empowerment, resources, advocacy, international linkages, infrastructure, youth policy, disadvantaged population groups, training and social policy.

In Victoria considerable activity has been taking place at State and local government level around the development of youth policy and some have actually been completed. A number of major reports recommending legislative, administrative and service delivery reforms have been completed and tabled. They include at the Victorian State level: the Blackburn report into education, and the Carney report of a review into Child Welfare Practice and Legislation; at the Federal level: the Kirby report into employment and training, and consideration of a Youth Guarantee Scheme and an Australian Youth Service. The journal would welcome comment on these developments.

The writer's personal perspective comes from many years of working with young people who have slipped through natural support networks into trouble with the law and out of home placement into residential institutions. At this heavy end of the system, movements are afoot in the
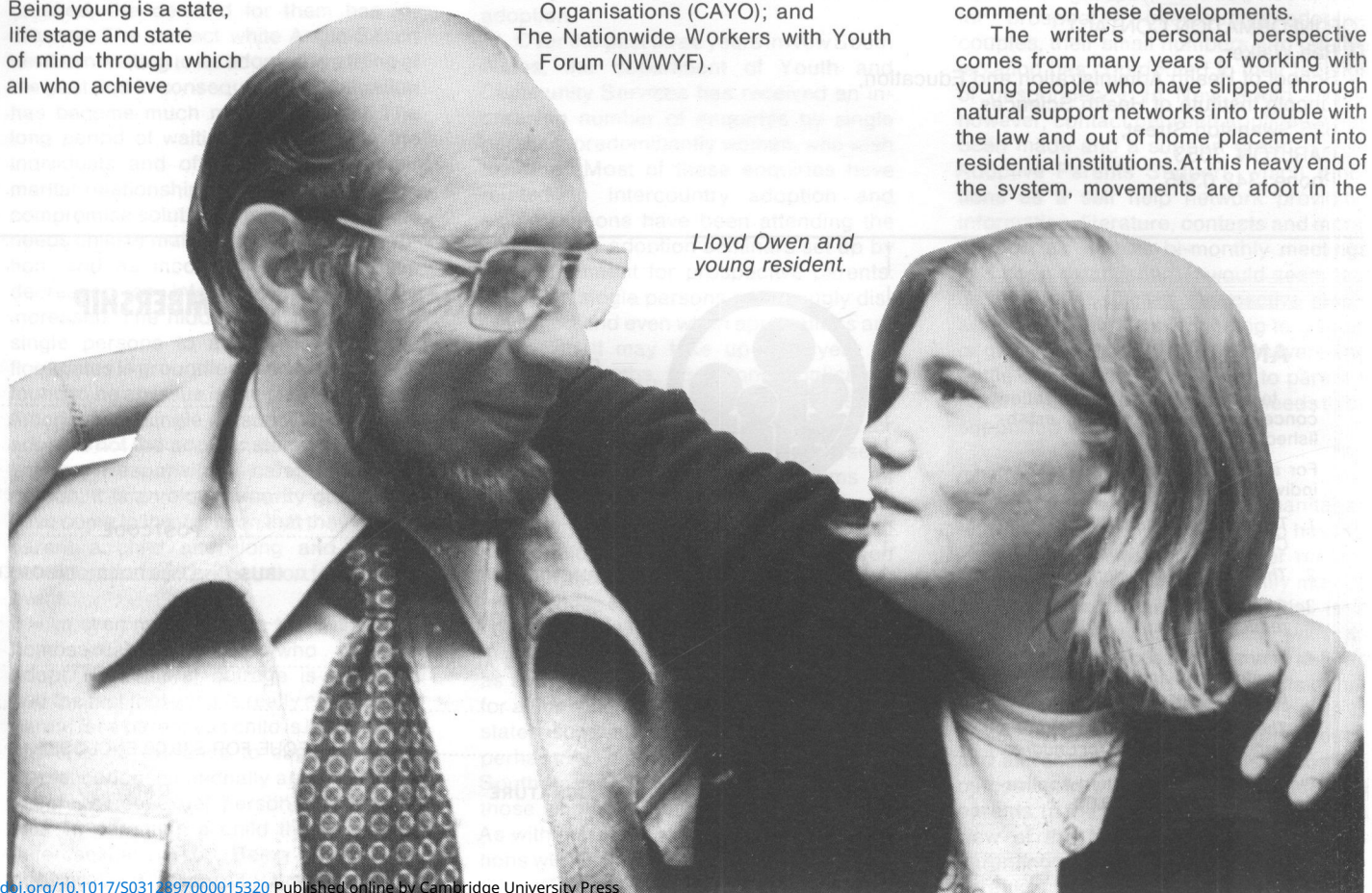
Lloyd Owen and young resident.

direction of deinstitutionalisation, decarceration, normalisation and integration. These movements represent noble intentions and sensible objectives. There is a danger, however, of simplistic approaches flowing from them and unless action is based on sound principles, sufficient understanding of human behaviour, adequate information of the nature and magnitude of the need, then the potential for negative unintended consequences is considerable.

In June, 1984 the writer had the good fortune to attend an Asian Pacific Conference on Juvenile Delinquency in San Jose. Two of the participants, Professor Harry Specht and Dianna Yach have kindly consented to their papers being published in this issue. In them attention is drawn to some of the issues and difficulties which come up in the context of meshing the needs and rights of young people in trouble with the needs and rights of other members of the community. It was also possible to visit Massachussetts where the most radical deinstitutionalisation development occurred when major youth training centres were closed in the early seventies.

On the local front the writer believes that one should not be dismayed by young people themselves. A multitude of encounters attests that each possesses the intrinsic worth that social workers learn about. Just like adults, each has the capacity to do many good and many awful things. In spite of a poor image in some sections of the media, high unemployment, difficulty in obtaining chosen places in education and training and often an uncertain future, most young people, most of the time, choose to do good things in their own eyes and the eyes of those who value them most. The number who actually get into trouble and stay in trouble are relatively few. Where a bad reputation exists, it is usually based on the transitory actions of many, who learn positive lessons as a consequence, or the extreme actions of a small minority, who are having great difficulty in making their way in life. It would be interesting to have data on each age cohort, year by year, as a means of comparing the way succeeding generations perform in relation to each other on both positive and negative social indicators. One such study in Sweden measuring juvenile offending behaviour demonstrated a considerable degree of stability in the incidence from generation to generation. The vast majority, whilst preparing for the future, are shouldering responsibility in the present adding energy, vitality, idealism and love to the daily round.

One cannot speak as warmly of the environment in which this generation is growing up. Whether it is better or worse than other periods in history is not really the question, in some respects it is decidedly better, but in terms of the legacies one generation leaves for another, we should ask what tasks are we setting for them in their adulthood and how well are they being equipped for those tasks physically, intellectually, emotionally and socially. It is obvious that conception and birth sets in motion a life course, a process of maturation through time, which is dramatically influenced by surrounding circumstances as time passes. The person moves through a series of life stages and transitional events.

The writer finds it useful to think of the surrounding environment at any moment in time as one's lifespace and the characteristic manner of acting on it as one's lifestyle. Thus the question becomes what quality can be attached to the life courses of this generation. What is put in, or taken out, of the life space of youth, as they grow? What encouragement exists for lifestyles which enhance future options for the individual and for the community to which the person will belong? How much peace and how much participation can occur to achieve the development of desirable ends.

Perhaps one major contributor, to the turbulence of life in the post industrial society, is the confusion attendant in efforts to determine what desirable ends might be. Rapidly and forcefully communicated demands for attention, time, allegiance and money are part of the technology assisted invasion of personal life space. The developmental task of revamping the values of parents and significant others into one's own values, a normal task in adolescence, can be overshadowed by a wide range of competing value systems. Tantalising goals of many kinds are raised and dashed through lack of means to attain them. Alternatively, they might be attained at the expense of other necessities, or at the cost of alienation from parents, or significant others. The residue of the many revolutions of the 20th century have impacted significantly on ideas of right and wrong, the mores and proscriptions which bind culture and subcultures together. In a climate of uncertainty about the future, many expectations and goals within the larger institutions in society have become very short term. Where long term goals exist they sometimes fall short when it comes to the question of social and natural ecological consequences. These, it is sometimes argued, are a problem for the next generation to solve.

The nurturing cocoon spun around the young individual by family and other caregivers, providing both support and control, is itself buffetted by rapid change in the external environment. A day is a long time in politics, fortunes are gained and lost within minutes in the speculative money market, forces at loose in the market place can raise or lower interest rates and change the rules of the game within days or weeks. The flexing of industrial muscle can stop trains, cut off electricity, stop revenue collection, often without much warning to the individual directly, or indirectly, affected. Prevailing notions of contingency management and consensus require constant adjustment to the rules of the game to maintain equilibrium, or at least detente among forces, which would be of great magnitude if they were to break free of their shackles for a time. The power of big government, big unions and big business is awesome and the observer does not need to be too cynical to regard as inadequate the value systems underpinning each of them. Big government — the retention of partisan power at the next election, big unions — the retention and extension of advantage for their own membership, regardless of the effect of the community and big business — the superordinate goal of profit with minimum regard for social, environmental or wider economic effects. For sure each of these institutions has some sense of the need to avoid biting the hand that feeds it, and some rhetoric at least, about contributing to the common good. When the chips are down the battle lines tend to be drawn around the institutionalised values of the organisation and the power base which supports them.

Amid such circumstances, what are realistic goals and expectations for the human race, which this generation, can hand on to the next? What are the objectives of our processes of socialisation? The catch cries of the past appear to have lost much meaning with the passage of time and events "For God and Empire", "Freedom", "Doing your own thing", Many young people today feel that the world has lost its way, yet individually they aspire to feeling happy, having a good job, having a good family, freedom from hassles, being loved, having an interesting life and sometimes excitement and a sense of importance. Such aspirations among young people even turn up in unlikely places like among kids on the street and in places of detention. One notes a sense of despair about the loss of means to attain such ends when conversing with the young addict whose main purpose seems to be to score, or the tough young hood who seems bent on destruction or disruption. Anxiety about attaining such things is often apparent among young students, the unemployed, the children of stressed, strained, breaking down and reconstituting families.

youth, we find ourselves working with the goals and expectations of young people, persuading them to adjust their sights and develop skills, tinkering with their life space and life style in an attempt to help them adjust their life course in directions which will fall within the limits of tolerance of the wider society. But what of the wider society? What messages can it give about collective desirable ends for individuals which are borne out by the generation with the power to influence events?

What broad social goals, can capture the imagination of the populace and those who hold the power in its institutions, and will foster positive personal goals and expectations?

Surely, a critical goal for all of the human race is the survival of future
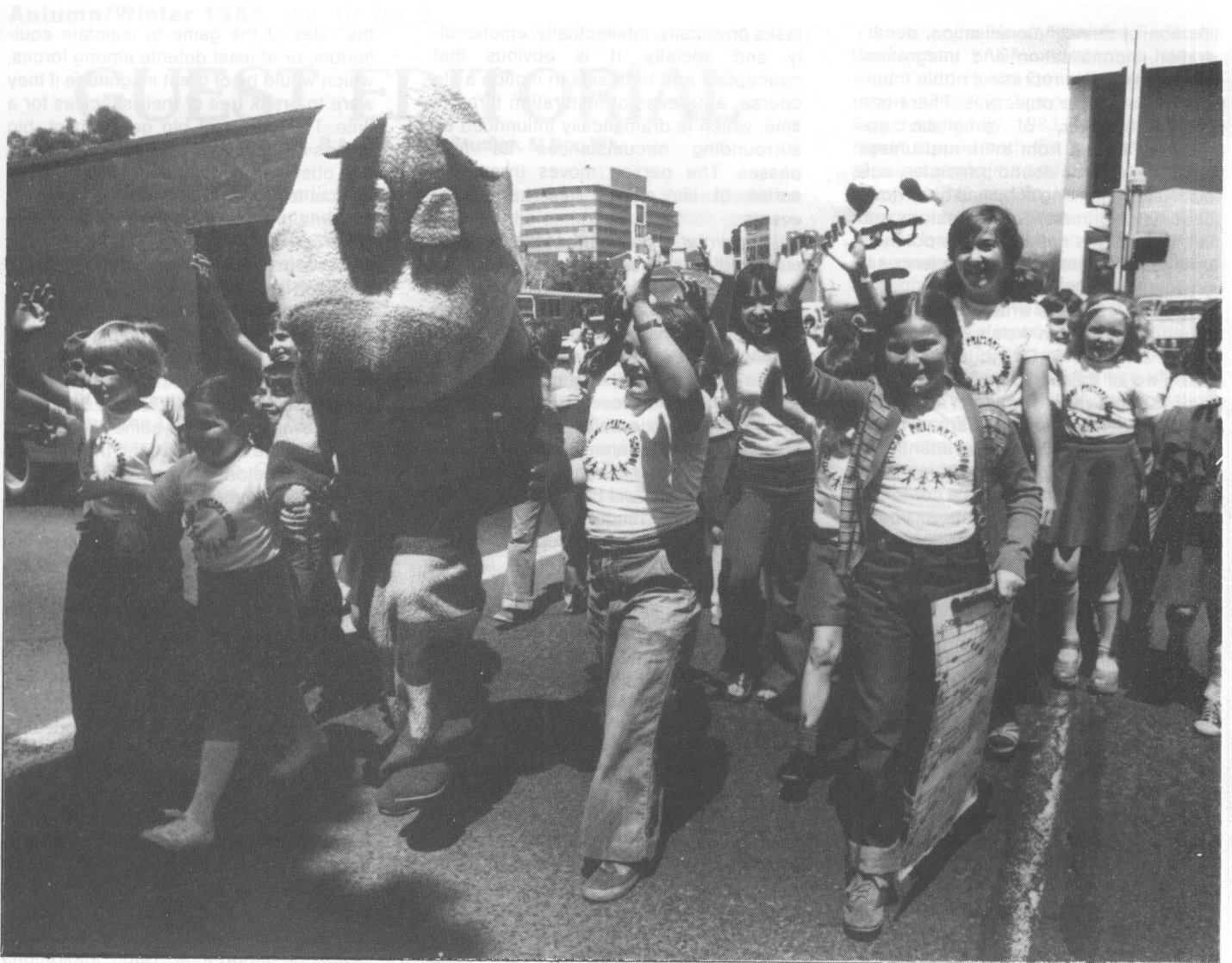
generations with lifestyles in harmony with the resources of the planet. This the writer believes is THE GREAT SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY. If human intelligence and a propensity for risk taking are ecological variables, it seems more sensible for them to be at work, tackling the problems and meeting the needs of the present generation, in a way which minimises the risks of the future rather than bringing us to the brink of destruction or natural resource depletion. It is not enough to simply hope that someone in future will come up with an answer, or to simply fail to acknowledge responsibility of this sort because it is not seen as part of the business at hand. A goal such as this deserves to become part of every piece of business at hand, on the agenda of constituents and consumers eveywhere, in the market place and in the halls of power. A major challenge is how to promote it and achieve it to sufficient degree in the present generation and how to socialise it in coming generations. The writer believes that some clues are to be found in social ecological approaches to human functioning. Accordingly some discussion of the IYY themes of development, participation and peace, using such a perspective, will follow in this and subsequent issues of the journal.
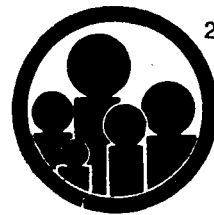
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