

Editorial

This winter across Australia, many families are having to cope with difficult economic times. The focus of interest and activity for governments, both state and federal, have shifted dramatically to debt management strategies, departments are being 'down-sized' whilst at the same time, revenues have dropped with the downturn in some commercial activities. Services are being squeezed at the same time as they report an increase in demand. Agencies responsible for providing material aid in particular, report significant increases in demand. Business of the larger corporate kind is moving to cut losses with retrenchments, many small businesses have joined the unprecedented volume of bankruptcies. Faith has been shaken in some financial institutions whose role might once have been seen as providing safe haven for the savings of depositors. At the same time, many of those versed in economics suggest that competition in a deregulated environment is the necessary precursor to a healthy economy.

It is clear that in many aspects of life, a measure of competition can add to healthy motivation and better performance, and can sometimes act as a curb to the excesses of a monopoly. There appear, however, to be many flaws in the view that competition as a mode of human interaction will deliver up the greatest good for the globe we occupy and its inhabitants. Even on the playing field rules, umpires and sanctioning bodies appear necessary to sort out the human propensities for excess and to keep the game honest and fair. Competition does appear to have a function in the processes of natural selection by eliminating the weak from the procreation stakes. If it is this type of role being performed for competition in the economic stakes then the safety net needed for the casualties needs to be taken seriously and to grow, rather than shrink, as it has in some social security areas. Competition is strongly tied to power in all its physical and social forms, one simply has to question the global relativities if the world is to be dominated by markets, power and profit. At the very least one might need to have some rules about the way in which profits might be used. Some recent events where electorates have been given the opportunity to register a view would suggest the presence just now of a community cry for help, some disenchantment with either policies, leadership or both, it seems that there may be a need to see and do things differently. Perhaps it is time to rediscover cooperation and neighbourliness as important aspects of community life at local, state and national levels. Competition implies winners and losers whilst cooperation is more likely to lead to a search for win win solutions.

Perhaps it is time to review our vision of our nation and its place in the global community. What are our preferred social goals? In what personal qualities should we invest pride and rewards? Should it be reaffirmed as the land of the fair go with a strong egalitarian sense or one in which



the strong profit at the expense of minorities or the weak? Should it be one in which we reward kindness, mercy, truth, effort, talent and skill used in service of the community? What value do we place on the environment and its preservation for our children?

There is a sense in which one of the casualties of our tight times is the idea of consultation and the participation of people in decision making which effects their lives. Desperate times require desperate measures and if asked, a needy or hurting populace, like Oliver, might ask for more. Yet, if ways are to be found out of these dilemmas this writer suspects that they will be tinged with grass roots realities. It is to be hoped that our leaders in politics, bureaucracy and business will not forget the importance of management by walking around, of seeing and hearing the person in the street and of trying to see through the eyes of the child, the future we are building now.

In the articles of this issue of Children Australia there is quite a sense of struggle to be found. Interestingly they are not about new struggles but old familiar ones from the child welfare field. What is new are some fresh perspectives and some indications that the struggles are being thought about and tackled in some places with some sense of challenge and gain. Sharon Moore extends the challenge to foster care practitioners and current community perspectives on caregiving having performed grass roots roles in that field. With some sense of tribute for the career of the late Noelle Belcher spent with hurt and troubled children, the team from Travancore Child and Family Centre, of which Noelle was part, have contributed their perspectives drawn from powerful day to day experience. Thank you to Chatra Weerasinghe and Chris Zsizsmann for this contribution concerning children with attachment problems and undersocialised conduct disorders. Wendy O'Brien after a long stint of practice with families at risk of losing their children to state care, has had the opportunity to reflect and write about program knowledge gained. For the benefit of practitioners and researchers interested in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, a team engaged in researching the Convention, are sharing with readers a new approach to looking at the articles of the Convention in terms of freedoms, entitlements, protections and parents' rights. The rearrangement is presented with the articles listed in summary form, the NCBA is also able to supply with the help of these authors, Donald Brieland, Wynne Korr, Barry Fallon and Di Bretherton, the full text of the convention in this rearranged form.

As usual, readers have book reviews to consider and Chris Goddard's reflective column provides more food for thought about institutional abuse – a timely reminder that the elimination of institutional abuse and neglect involves more than into smaller locations in the community.

Lloyd Owen