

# PRIORITIES



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SOCIALIST  
PERSPECTIVE

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## **Society's Children**



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*"The issues and demands raised by the Women's Liberation Movement are integral to the development of a democratic socialist society. The NDP actively encourages and provides support for women organizing around the demands of the Women's Liberation Movement and commits an NDP government to creating the legislation necessary to realize these demands."*

— NDP Policy on Women's Rights

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*Thanks to all the workers who have made the production and distribution of this magazine possible.*



## Time for redefinition

Got a problem you don't want to face? There's a well-tested method for avoiding it.

1. Define the situation in language which disguises its real nature.
2. Describe as "natural" or "inevitable" everything which preserves the status quo, especially where your own power, comfort, or privilege are involved.
3. Label as "unnatural," "destructive," or "selfish" anything which might require you to alter your own behaviour.
4. Invent complicated and confusing explanations designed to arouse feelings of anxiety, self-doubt, and guilt in those who want to change things.
5. Blame the victim!

*Priorities* does not claim to have invented this set of rules, nor do we recommend it to our readers. Unfortunately, the formula is in widespread use, and it has been particularly effective as a way of obscuring the problem. Terms like "interspousal violence" serve to disguise the fact that one out of every ten women runs the risk of being assaulted by her husband or male companion. The general term "incest" covers the reality that 97% of the adults who abuse their children sexually are male, and 92% of the abused children are female. Definitions of masculinity and femininity are used to sanction aggressive and destructive male behaviour, and to reinforce female dependence and passivity. Concepts like the maternal instinct serve to ensure that women continue to perform the unpaid work of the family, and to persuade them that they should act as mothers not only to their children, but to their husbands and bosses as well.

And when, as a result of these patterns, women find themselves trapped in female job ghettos, condemned to poverty in later life, the victims of sexual abuse and physical assault, they are told it is their own fault!

A girl of 10, assaulted by her foster father, is described by a social worker as "sexually provocative." Battered wives are routinely urged to remain in violent and even life-threatening situations, and to change their own behaviour, in order to preserve the family unit.

As a result of carefully documented research undertaken by feminist researchers in the last decade, it is becoming increasingly clear that there is an urgent need for a redefinition of the very term "family," for it is in the nuclear family itself that oppressive, sexist values are being reproduced. Like "the economy" which serves the interests of those who control the wealth, make the decision and reap the profits, "the family" under capitalism is an instrument for administering and maintaining patriarchal oppression and inequality.

Today the failures of the capitalist economy are undermining the small gains made by women in the last ten years. The cry of "restraint" is being used as an excuse for layoffs, job freezes, wage cuts, and the dismantling of social services. It is imperative that feminists resist the effort to reassert the primacy of the nuclear family as an economic unit, and to coerce women to return to a condition of domestic dependency. The enormous effort to unlearn the lessons of subservience, submission, and deprivation has not yet come to an end. We must not allow those lessons to be taught to our children all over again.



## Women's Conference slated

by Shelley Rivkin

At the last steering committee meeting there was serious discussion about how we could develop the necessary strategies to get the Women's Rights Committee program implemented. It was decided, as a result of last year's success, and ongoing requests for more, that an effective vehicle would be the holding of another one day conference.

Slated for Saturday, May 1, the conference will serve two purposes. One, the development of strategies around three areas: non-traditional jobs, Task Force on Older Women and Repeal 251. Second, skill development in areas such as campaigning, lobbying and confidence building. In the evening, there will be a dinner, guest speakers, and May Day celebrations. Specific details are printed in another section of *Priorities*.

This is an important conference for women. It appears likely that we will be heading into another election soon. We need to be prepared, not only with a clear statement of our program, but also the strategies and practical skills to implement that program. We need to have women in every riding, knowledgeable and trained, to work at their constituency level, so that membership understands our program. It is essential that the issues we have collectively defined and developed, become an integral part of the election campaign.

Your support and participation are required to make the conference a success. Talk to other women in your constituency and encourage them to come. Bring your ideas and skills. I look forward to seeing you all.





"SEED CORN MUST NOT BE GROUND" — KATHIE KOLLWITZ

## A glimpse into the history of children

by Joyce Meissenheimer

What is a "child?" When does "childhood" end? Such questions are by no means as meaningless as they might appear at first glance. Concepts of "children" and "childhood" have differed just as much as any other features of different societies in history.

Human history is a story of change, of social forces interacting, usually in conflict. There are no stable, absolute norms of functioning for anyone. About the only "natural" (the term usually used for this elusive absolute norm) phenomenon related to children is that they all come into the world by the same process. Even this process is now being experimented with in test tube births and genetic engineering.

The people who make up the social forces in history consciously intervene in the processes of change. A particular exception is the very young who are unable to organize themselves for conscious articulation of their needs, and of struggle to attain them. This function of children as a social force is assumed by

others in society and the conflicting needs of those actors predominate in the actual situation of children in any given society.

Desires individual parents may have to provide their children with the very best are entirely dependent on what the ruling powers are prepared to go along with. If this conflicts with the independent needs of children, then those needs are sacrificed.

### What is a "human being?"

What differentiates humans from other creatures? Humans engage in socially productive labouring. They will organize themselves into appropriate social units to achieve some end. They do so consciously — they sit around in meetings and discuss and plan their activities. Whatever they decide to do to interact with their environment, they labour together to achieve. The usual rebuttal to this definition is: what about ants and beavers? The social organization of such creatures is invariant, they do

not consciously change and reshape them to achieve different ends. They do not hold the meetings, etc. Their interaction with their environment is constant and predictable.

### Alienation

The majority of humans today are victims of some degree of alienation from the socially conscious productive process. Their own consciousness is subordinate to the conscious decisions of those who hold the power. These same forces determine the order of social organization people are herded into. And the productive process is geared to the profit-making needs of those in power.

At no other time in human history have children been so totally excluded from the essence of being a human, from the socially productive process.

They are locked into social institutions — the family, schools — over which they have no control except in rebellion against them. They are totally excluded from sharing in the production of goods and services society needs.

A rapid run through history will illustrate this view. The earliest forms of human society were the food-gathering primitive societies like most native Indian and Inuit societies before the advent of the colonial invader. These societies were egalitarian — there were no social groups profiting at the expense of others. Children too were equal and this equality was limited only by the obvious lesser physical and mental capacities of the very young. They participated with their elders in all forms of human activity, including producing for their needs. They received their education in this social cooperation. There was a time in human history when no-one knew that males were fathers, that conception resulted from sexual intercourse between male and female. There was no such thing as a "family" of father, mother and child. Mothers formed social groupings and cared for the young co-operatively.

When agriculture and the domestication of animals evolved, this egalitarianism survived for a long time. A more complex division of labour emerged. But children were fully integrated into the productive process and had a real function in society.

### First class-divided societies

The first class-divided societies to emerge were slave-based, the best-known of which were ancient Greece and Rome. The ruling class owned both the slaves and everything they laboured to produce.

These two classes of people had no common interests. The obvious conflict





*"Our children are the most oppressed prisoners in our society. . ."*

between the interests of slave-owner and enslaved resulted in slave rebellions which, together with the development of more efficient methods of exploiting human labour, produced a new social order characterized by medieval feudal societies where the church and nobility owned the land which was worked by the peasantry living in a state of serfdom.

This system was, in turn, overthrown by the great industrial revolutions which resulted in a ruling class of owners of capital and technology and an exploited class of "free" men and women who laboured to produce profit for their exploiters and wages barely sufficient to provide for themselves and children.

The inherent conflict in the opposing interests of these two classes have, in this century, resulted in revolutions which have produced a new order of societies where the owners of the means of production have been, or are being, expropriated and different models of society aimed at eliminating class divisions are being developed today as we can see in the USSR, China, Cuba, Nicaragua, Grenada and the present conflict in Central America.

As an aside, the writer does not regard the dictatorial bureaucracies in the Soviet Union and China as a "class" both owning and controlling the means of production as capitalists do in our society, but as a parasitic caste which excludes the workers from democratic participation in running the state based on social ownership of property.

### Children in social evolution

Now, where do children feature in this highly condensed and simplified historical picture? Reference has been made to the full integration of children into the socially productive processes in early egalitarian societies.

When the first slave-based societies appeared, dramatic changes in the situ-

ation of children ensued. First of all, there was no comparison between the children of slaves and of slave-owners. Slave children were not owned by their mothers, much less their fathers. The institutions of marriage and the family were meaningless for slaves. The offspring of slave-owners were in a different category altogether. If male, they were the inheritors of their fathers' property. This was the period in history in which the institutions of marriage and the family were codified for the benefit of the ruling class. The family was an economic unit designed for the preservation of property and marriage was designed to control the exchange of property among members of the ruling class. The word "family" is derived from the Latin "familia" which means simply the servants of a man's household including his slaves, wife and children. The slave-owner assumed full responsibility for the slave children he owned, for their food, clothing, health and training. And, of course, slave children had to work to the full extent of their capacities.

Children of serfs in medieval times were supported chiefly by their parents' having to produce for their own needs after fulfilling their obligations to the owners of the land to which they were tied. But these children shared the toil of their parents. The ruling class assumed responsibilities regarding the health and education of children, the latter being mainly religious.

### Where we are today

Capitalism has entrenched the working class family as an economic unit for the reproduction, care, upbringing and socialization of its workers. Although the modern capitalist state provides a host of social services such as schools, hospitals, recreational facilities, etc., these are provided as a privilege to bolster the family unit and not as rights which are to be guaranteed at all times.

Because of the complexity of modern

technology, capitalism can find no use for the participation of children in the productive process, not even as exploited labour today. Children have no *human* function in our society. Put quite bluntly, they are, in the first place, victims of their parents — good, bad or indifferent. This is because they and their parents are the victims of an exploiting ruling class.

Furthermore, "childhood" has been extended to an age unheard of in earlier societies. Many people are "children" well into their adulthood as they struggle to educate themselves by scrounging off their parents and the state to educate themselves to join the labour market.

### The way to change

How can we change this? We have to recognize some realities.

— Parents must cease to feel guilt over their relative helplessness to control provision for the future of their children. They must put the onus fairly and squarely where it belongs, on the expropriators of the wealth they produce. This means free, democratic schooling at all levels, free child care, health services and so on.

— Children must be integrated into social production. If modern society requires long periods of schooling, then this should be combined with real social production as they do in Cuba. Furthermore, the function of being a student is a real productive one. Students must work and study hard. This work should be recognized and paid for. At the very least, education should be a right and should not cost anything. This includes child care for pre-schoolers.

If society were to assume total responsibility for the care of the young, the working class family unit would disappear. One can speculate endlessly on the kinds of interpersonal relationships between men, women and children that would ensue. But we can have no change without the pre-conditions mentioned. Attempts by beleaguered parents to devise alternative life patterns without these essential changes basically change very little.

Finally, we should never forget that the children of the owners of power live in another world. Their parents hire others to care for their day to day needs all of which are guaranteed, especially those needed to equip them to inherit the power.

Our children are the most oppressed prisoners in our society which has the means to provide for their every imaginable need, unheard of in earlier times. Their capacities to organize themselves for liberation are limited. We must lead the way. ♀





## Child Care is enriching

by Astrid Davidson

When we talk about child care we talk about the lack of it, the cost, the needs of the parents. Usually, we speak of "quality" care. We say we need more "quality" care, or the "quality" has diminished because funding has decreased. Yet, despite our persistent use of the word, do we really know what it is?

When I hear the word, I picture my mother buying bed sheets. She would handle the material and say: "this is good quality" or "this is poor." She never bought the poor stuff. The quality of a product can be measured, but who knows what a "quality" service is?

I remember writing a child care resolution some years back and insisting that the word "quality" be included. It was the correct word but I had no idea what providing "quality" child care would entail. The experts would know, I thought.

Now I am a parent, The word has meaning. Quality child care is important. So important that I willingly make it a priority above all other expenses.

My daughter was asked recently what she thought of mummy working. "Oh," said Elisabeth, "my mummy has to work so I can go to child care."

Elisabeth is lucky to be in a child care centre. She is even more fortunate that it is a "quality" child care centre. Yet, there were raised eyebrows when I kept her in the centre while on maternity leave. And, I've heard comments about "parents who dump their children in one of those daycare centres." (Read "terrible places.")

An inquiry as to why more people from our mixed income housing project

did not use the project's child care centre produced the following replies: Some households have only one parent working; some find the centre too expensive (\$215 per month); but the main reason is that people feel that their children are better off being cared for in a "family situation." Several "family care" places are in operation in the project.

### Child care not "second best"

I believe that the ignorance surrounding child care centres, how they function and what they offer has a direct effect on the quality and growth of child care services available. We must make people aware that a child care centre is not the "second best" place for a child. Although I have always supported free 24-hour child care, I was apprehensive when my child enrolled in a centre two years ago.

Those apprehensions soon disappeared. When Elisabeth walked into the centre the first day she was excited to see so many of her friends there. They were finger-painting with chocolate pudding. I no longer existed.

Yet, that evening when her father picked her up, she was eager to come home, proudly clutching her bag of "art." This was not the usual crayon or paint collection. These were colourful collages made of macaroni, felt, feathers, pieces of wallpaper, twigs, leaves. Today, our kitchen has become an art gallery and the front hall usually has a pile of "garbage" waiting to be taken to the centre and turned into some new creation. I've learned a lot about art through Elisabeth.

The child care centre is divided into many areas. (There are no sexist divisions). There is a quiet space with books and records, a playhouse area with dress-up clothes, a nap area, a sandbox and a craft area. There are plants, birds, fish, gerbils and other little animals which the children care for and learn about.

### Variety of experiences

One week the children had a Chinese Week and learned about the Chinese culture. They went to Chinatown for lunch and one of the children's parents brought Chinese cookies as a treat. Other cultures are experienced and appreciated in a similar fashion. Day trips are frequent. Elisabeth has been to the aquarium, seen pizzas made, toured the bus barns, the Aldergrove game farm and the library. There is also a "grandparents day" when older people from the project visit the centre. And there are bake days to make cookies and bread and birthday cakes.

Elisabeth learned about nutrition at the centre and politely but firmly informs us what is nutritional, bad or a "sneaky snack." When we are shopping she proudly points out poison, flammable or dangerous products. She learned the signs at child care centre. She was taught traffic safety at the centre when she was three. I had thought she was too young to learn these things.

Elisabeth has taught us new meanings to words. Share means sharing sadness and happiness as well as treats. "Not managing" means not behaving properly. We like those words as well as others that pop up in her vocabulary — cooperate, consideration. We were amazed how her manners had improved after only a week at the centre. What had we been doing wrong? We had tried so hard.

There are other things that Elisabeth has learned because she goes to the centre. She has learned why some children don't have two parents and why some children have "funny" clothes. When it appeared that a picket line might go up around the centre, we explained to Elisabeth why she would not be crossing it. I had thought that we would discuss these things when she was a teenager.

Elisabeth's father and I know that the child care centre provides Elisabeth with more experiences than either one of us could give her at home. We almost feel that we have learned as much as she has since her first day at the centre. We know we are starting her out in life in the best way possible. We wish that more children had the same opportunity. Quality child care is an enriching experience. ♀



# Federal action for Canada's children in the 1980's



*A summary of MP Margaret's Mitchell's brief on behalf of the New Democratic Party to the Standing Committee on Health, Welfare, and Social Affairs of the House of Commons, July 1981.*

*by Kathie Robertson*

In 1979 we celebrated the International Year of the Child. Or at least we appeared to do so. Certainly the media was full of the message: it was to be a very special year for children all over the world. Everywhere, governments and private agencies responded enthusiastically to the concept of a special year for children and to the challenge implicit in its creation.

In Canada a Commission was formed to outline a national agenda for action. It pressed for the acceptance of three principles: that programs for children be an integral part of social and economic plans, that children be the responsibility of all levels of government, and that children be a first priority. The Commission stressed that "in the structure of the Government of Canada there is no place where they are a primary concern."

In the same year the federal government established a sub-committee within the Health, Welfare and Social Affairs department to make recommendations supporting the Commission's call for action. In due course, its proposals were made public.

## Children betrayed

Margaret Mitchell, MP for Vancouver

East, says of the report: "the federal government has betrayed Canada's children." On behalf of the New Democratic Party, she prepared a brief entitled "Federal Action for Canada's Children in the 80s" for submission to the HWSA department. In it she says that the failure of the sub-committee to recommend strong federal action to improve the situation for Canadian children has made a mockery of the IYC. She will not support the federal proposals because they:

- fail to advocate major and immediate action;
- fail to recognize the importance, and responsibility for, a strong federal role;
- fail to establish the elimination of poverty as the priority — although it is the most severe problem facing Canada's children, native and non-native.

Below is a summary of Mitchell's brief:

## SIX URGENT PRIORITIES

### Income support programs

13% of our children live in poverty. Because the tax and income security

systems determine the patterns of income distribution in this country, the federal government can, if it will, dramatically reduce poverty. Mitchell recommends the following actions:

- increase the child tax credit for lower income families, ensuring that those credits go to the parent rearing the child;
- replace income support programs for families falling below the poverty line with a guaranteed annual income;
- implement a national nutrition program: programs in schools and child care centres, pre-natal allowances, etc.
- increase the supply of quality, affordable housing for families with children.

### Native children

Paternalism and ignorance have guided federal decisions affecting native people for so long that the plight of their children is a national disgrace.

The brief calls for emergency action to:

- allow Indian, Inuit, Metis and non-status Indian people to establish their own programs with federal funding;
- uphold native rights by settling land claims and revising the Indian Act to protect the status of Indian children.
- develop legislation to protect the rights of children within the native environment;
- extend federal funds towards improving health care, sanitation and housing; supporting self-help programs and providing food subsidies for children, whether living on reserves, in urban centres, or in the North;
- fund educational programs to be directed by native people;
- support economic programs offering employment and training opportunities.

### Preventive help

Mitchell commends the shift towards preventive action rather than crisis-oriented programs, and believes the federal government should:

- provide incentives for provinces to invest in prevention of child neglect and abuse;
- establish an "Action program for Canada's children:" at the pre-school level, including family resources centres, parent education and relief services, counselling, and more.
- fund special programs for adolescent parents, involving education, child care and community support.

### Child care

In 1979 over 600,000 children under age seven had no access to licensed child care — there are estimates of over one



million "latch-key" children across Canada. In many countries, government-sponsored childcare programs are provided as a matter of course. Therefore, she recommends that the federal government legislate a National Child Care Act spelling out national standards for a broad range of services:

Extend day care subsidies; provide realistic child care expense deductions in income tax formulas; fund additional non-profit child care facilities; introduce nine months paid child care leave for federal government employees as an example to private industry; and amend the Canada Pension Plan to give pension credits for those caring for young children.



#### Job training for youth

The most serious problem facing young people today is lack of employment (over half of Canada's unemployed are between the ages of 15 and 24). The federal government should emphasize job-oriented training (for example, by scholarships for training in critical skill areas) particularly in localities and occupations where there is a shortage of skilled labour. It should expand apprentice programs with union and employer co-operation.

#### Recognition of Children's Rights

Legislation to protect the rights of children is vitally important. It should include the adoption of a Children's Bill of Rights based on the U.N. International Declaration of the Rights of the Child, which would form the basis for federally-planned children's services and policy negotiations with the provinces.

Further recommendations call for: the appointment of a Children's Ombudsperson based on the Swedish model; access by the child to independent legal counsel; programs to counteract increasing violence towards and exploitation of children; and enforcement of maintenance and custody orders.

## MEANS TO OUR GOALS

### Ministry of Children

Margaret Mitchell believes that none of the recommendations above can be fully implemented unless the federal government creates a new cabinet position: a Minister for Children. A deputy minister, as the Commission for the IYC advocates, would not have enough political power to influence senior departments. Even less influential would be a junior minister of state for children in the Department of Social Development proposed by the HWSA sub-committee. Only a minister of the cabinet would have the strong, independent mandate needed to initiate and monitor legislation and policies.

### Children's Bureau

One of the first jobs of the Minister for Children would be to legislate a Children's Bureau.

The Commission for the IYC en-

visaged a Children's Bureau as a "responsibility centre." Mitchell sees the Bureau as playing a far more influential role: it must have a mandate to press for programs and reforms that are needed.

It must challenge existing departments and agencies to be more responsive to children's needs. It would work closely with the Justice Department, the Department of Employment and Immigration. Its closest link should be with Health and Welfare to initiate an "action program for Canada's children."

Mitchell recognizes that although this alternative proposal for federal action does not cover all children's issues, it does identify six priority areas which require immediate attention. She concludes her brief by saying that the federal government has a major role to play in ensuring a healthy, secure, creative future for our younger generation — the time for federal action is now.



### INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY — 1982

Saturday, March 6, dawned bright and sunny in Vancouver for the annual march and rally celebrating International Women's Day. About 500 participants carried banners including our own NDP Women's Rights Committee one. Others featured almost every women's group in Vancouver plus groups from as far afield as the Yukon. Trade unions included the Canadian Union of Postal workers and The International Ladies Garment Workers.

Because of their slender resources and low priority media status domestic workers and immigrant women were given a prominent place on the platform of speakers. Margaret Mitchell, M.P. (Vancouver East) brought greetings from the federal NDP caucus.

PHOTO JO DUNAWAY LAZENBY



# Children from violent homes

by Sue Sopp-Gillson

*'Priorities' is grateful to the Women's Research Centre and Vancouver Transition House for permission to reprint the following excerpt from a conference paper originally published as Appendix V in 'Battered and Blamed,' a report on wife assault from the perspective of battered women, November 1980.*

I'd like to begin by giving you a brief description of the kinds of kids we see at Transition House and how some of them react to the crisis that is taking place in their families.

Virtually all the children we see at Transition House show above average stress-related physical or emotional symptoms. They are unsettled and anxious because yet another insecurity has been put on their plates to deal with, the move away from their homes. That entails a separation from school and friends, fathers, toys, everything except their mothers and whatever small items she managed to pack with her when she left. A few of the kids don't even have their own pyjamas so they're "freaked out." In addition to this general anxiety many of them have been threatened or have heard their mother being threatened with pretty dire consequences about what will happen "if they aren't home when dad gets home from work." They seem really torn between feeling relieved that they aren't at home and being terrified about not being there. This leads, especially with school age children, to a heavy pressuring "number" that they do on their moms. "Come on Mom, we have to go home, what's Dad going to say when he gets home and finds us not there?"

## Visiting with fathers

Now I'd like to address the question of access and supervised visiting. It is my feeling that the professionals who are dealing with these families are not taking the children into account when deciding whether there are to be visits with their fathers.

I think that the children may need a cooling off period similar to their mothers and many times what happens is that a social worker or court worker is pressured by the father to see the kids. They respond to the pressure by passing it on to the mother and insisting on visiting being set up immediately. It is

my experience that a lot of times these visits are disastrous.

While the family is housed at Transition House the visits that occur are supervised. One reason is that many of the mothers have some anxiety about the father taking the children and thereby securing a lever to pressure her to return to the home. We have had a number of cases where children have been taken out and not returned. So the visits have to be supervised.

I've supervised quite a number of visits that have been set up and have found every one of them to be very tense and upsetting for the children. In most cases the fathers use this time with the children to try to get information about where they are staying; also to try to pressure the kids into "talking sense" into their mothers and getting her to return home. If the children show any support for their mother's position they are regaled with tales of what a no good person she is — i.e. "If your mother really loved you she wouldn't break up our family this way."

## Forced contact for children

Children who have been removed from their homes for reasons of violence certainly do not need the added pressure of being forced to visit with someone they fear. It is clearly an unfair system where a woman receives a no-contact order and thereby establishes her right to refrain from communicating with her husband, but her children are forced to continue contact with him whether they choose to or not.

If conditions of access or supervised visits are to be made in a court order, the worker should see to it that their interviews include a series of questions concerning the children. By piecing together a picture of how the family operates we are better able to determine whether it will be traumatic for the child to go for, say a month, without seeing the other parent or whether that particular child could benefit from a temporary break in contact. It would be

very beneficial for workers to speak directly to children about whether they wish to see the other parent or not.

Being consulted directly about this can greatly reduce the pressure that the child is under and will also alleviate some of the powerlessness they are experiencing.

## Ground rules for fathers

By gathering some information from the father about his day-to-day functioning with the children, workers will be better able to set up conditions for visits that will be comfortable and pleasurable. A couple of suggestions are outlining some ground rules with the father about what areas he can discuss with the children.

This is a very touchy area for me because I have seen the intensity of the emotional stress it creates in children when they experience a visit that has not been carefully planned. While the family is at Transition House one of the staff will usually keep a close eye on what is going on. But often when a woman moves to her new home, there has been an order with which she must comply.

A woman with whom I had only phone contact was living in an apartment with her windows boarded up to prevent a very violent husband from breaking in. He had been terrorizing her and her two year old daughter by throwing bricks through their bedroom windows and gaining access by climbing over the balcony.

She was caught in a difficult legal situation where four visits had been granted on an interim custody order and the final custody hearing was still a month away. She was bound by that order and she was terrified. Her worker and I both advised her to disappear but her lawyer had told her that that action might negatively affect her case for custody. So there they sat, immobilized with fear.

## Closer watch needed

There must be a closer watch kept on these situations where children are being passed between mother and father during a period of crisis. Where a woman has laid an assault charge all the details of that assault have not come to light and the visits can put the woman and her children in a dangerous situation. Before orders of this type are made, workers must obtain all the details of why the charge was laid. There should be an assessment done after the first few visits and any areas of concern they may have. So far as I know, this is not common practice and there is considerable buck-passing between agencies when it comes to following up on these families. ♀



# Dedication and frustration: child care services in the Kootenays

by Joanne Partridge

Sandy pulled her old Chevy over to the side of the highway and got out to check the condition of the turn-off. Already fatigued by the 50 mile drive over winter roads, she was not looking forward to the next stage in her journey—a two-mile climb up an infrequently plowed logging road. After twenty minutes of cautiously creeping around blind corners, and fighting to avoid the snowy ruts, she arrived at her stopping point. This had to be the place — there was the path leading into the bush and the hand-lettered wooden sign. She pulled her car as far as possible off the road, hoping she wouldn't be stuck when she tried to leave. Donning her packsack full of books, reports and toys, she put her snowshoes on and began the three-quarter mile trek up the mountain path.

Sandy Crossley, Infant Development worker for the West Kootenays, was paying a visit to one of her clients. Over the next few hours she would assess the progress in the developmentally delayed infant since her last visit, perhaps introduce some stimulating toys, and discuss the baby's individual program with the parents.

Sandy only laughs at the suggestion that such tasks represent outstanding dedication to her job. While an exceptional individual herself, she is only representative of many people in the West Kootenays who are dedicated to providing children with services despite woefully inadequate funding, large areas to be covered, and lack of specialized support services.

## 80,000 population base

Although the communities in the Kootenay area are comparatively less isolated than many northern communities, the Infant Development Program with its one and a half workers covers a population base of about 80,000. The small cities and towns spread out in a 100 mile radius from Castlegar, where the Program's office is located. Prior to August 1981, Sandy covered the entire area herself, sometimes with the aid of volunteers she trained for specific cases. When Jeanie Moylan was hired to help out, Sandy cut her own paid hours so



that they would each have a ¾-time job.

The Infant Development workers improvise much-needed services — such as training volunteers to help parents, locating and training temporary “foster” homes to offer “respite care” for infants so that their parents can get a much-needed break and training child care workers.

Most of these types of support services are provided by existing agencies in Vancouver, and the burden of creating the services locally is felt by the Infant Development workers and the limited resources provided by the Ministry of Human Resources.

“Services have to be provided on an ad-hoc basis — and that's expensive,” says Jeannie, who explains that it can take nine months to a year just to get one particular service established for one child. Of course, it is the Infant Development worker who must set up the service, find the organization or person to do the job, train them, and endeavour to find a way to fund the service either through MHR or by recruiting volunteers or by trying to integrate their needs with other agencies.

## Inadequate budget

The Program's initial budget in 1977 was extremely inadequate. For instance, the Program was allowed \$25 for rent and \$10 a month for office supplies. At one point, Sandy had to move the office into her home. Although things have improved, the Program is still dependent on donations in order to have a workable budget.

The Infant Development Program's problems are an excellent example of the “penny-wise, pound-foolish” approach by the Socreds to social issues. Serious and permanent problems can be alleviated and even prevented if developmentally delayed infants can be reached at the earliest opportunity. If these infants do not get the attention they require, many could end up on social assistance for the rest of their lives.

The Infant Development Program is funded by the Ministry of Human Resources under the sponsorship of the Kootenay Columbia Childcare Society.

The fact that the Program has survived at all over the past four years is more of a tribute to the individuals in



volved than to the policies of the Socred administration. The program functions with the help of an Advisory Committee and a Case Review Committee, all volunteers, representing professionals such as doctors, physiotherapists, childcare workers, social workers, along with parents.

The Society also sponsors the Hobbit Hill Daycare in Castlegar and its Special Needs Daycare Program. Many infants "graduate" to the Special Needs Group from the Infant Development Program after they turn three.

#### Kootenay Columbia Childcare Society

The story of the Kootenay Columbia Childcare Society is once again representative of the kind of hard work and dedication that goes into providing services for children in the West Kootenays.

The Society began in 1971 when a handful of people met to try to start a child care centre. It seems surprising now, but one of the major obstacles was the scepticism of local residents, some of whom protested to city hall over the zoning for the centre. Child care was somehow associated with the local "hippie" movement and was probably viewed as being destructive to the nuclear family unit.

Eventually this resistance was overcome, and Hobbit Hill was built with funds from MHR, LIP grants, donations from local industry, and of course lots of volunteer help. The Society did provide some services for handicapped preschoolers with no extra funding, but in 1977 a grant was obtained and the Special Needs Centre was set up in the basement of the Centre.

Currently, Hobbit Hill is supported by the parents who pay \$200 per month for each of their children attending. Special Needs is funded mainly by MHR. In 1981, the Society obtained a \$12,500 grant from the Vancouver Foundation to upgrade facilities. The same amount had to be raised in the community to qualify for the grant and there were tense moments last summer as the Society struggled to find donations before the deadline. Fortunately, local business and industry, service clubs and individuals came through. The actual work was carried out by volunteers.

Ann Holden, the Society's paid coordinator, is responsible for the administration of the Day Care Program, the Special Needs Centre, the Infant Development Program and an additional project, the local Volunteer Exchange. The Society recently had to drop responsibility for providing child care workers after the administrative load became too much for their limited resources.

"Our programs are all underfunded —

severely underfunded," says Ann, but she noted that "in many ways Castlegar is particularly well served because of the dedication of a few people." She explained how increasing pressure from MHR for more long range planning, job descriptions, staff evaluation and sophisticated budgeting is placing an ever increasing demand on the paid staff and volunteers of the Society. The extra paper work simply cannot be handled by one part-time co-ordinator.



#### Lack of support services

Brian Earthy, District Supervisor at Trail's Ministry of Human Resources office, is aware of the problems inherent in providing services in rural areas. When questioned on the level of funding for children's services as compared with MHR districts in the Lower Mainland, Brian replied, "I don't think there is a balance." He noted the many resources and specialists available in Vancouver which aren't available here and the distance factor which makes it impossible to provide the level of service needed with the budget we have.

Most of the major towns in the West Kootenays now have child care centres or are working on getting a group together. Castlegar, Trail, Grand Forks and Nakusp each have one group day care centre. Unfortunately, Trail's child care shuts down for two months in the summer. Fruitvale and Kaslo are in the process of establishing groups.

Nelson is particularly well served with child care — there are two group child care centres which are always advertising available spaces. This seems surprising, considering the wait list in other centres. Why the difference? Well, it seems that during our days in the sun as the government of B.C., Nelson was selected for a pilot program on Family Day Care. There are now between 20 and 25 homes in Nelson, providing small-group care for children including infants. The Family Day Care Organization is the only organization in the West Kootenays that provides day care for infants.

The Trail and Castlegar MHR offices have hired a person to assess the child care situation in the two areas and look

at the feasibility of forming family child care in these two towns.

Only Castlegar and Trail have centres for children with "special needs." Trail's Children's Development Centre, sponsored by the West Kootenay Cerebral Palsy Association, runs a learning program funded by MHR and a treatment program funded by the Minsistry of Health. Two full-time physiotherapists work out of the Centre, spending 21% of their time on the road covering a vast area.

#### Pervasive underfunding

Lilian Michallik of Trail's Centre is critical of the chronic underfunding and worried that the cutbacks in the Health budget may eliminate some of the already overtaxed services such as the physios visits to the Hobbit Hill Special Needs Centre.

Lilian also expresses the need for more support services. Many children and their parents have to travel the 400 miles to Vancouver to an assessment centre. Not every family is able to make such a trip. Lilian feels that the local population base is large enough to justify a local assessment centre.

The familiar refrain of lack of funds extends to the Ministry of Education arena. Judy Pollard and Selma Sheldon are instructors at Selkirk College's Early Childhood Education Program in Castlegar where they teach pre-school workers in a 10-month program. Because of the length of the program, students cannot take maximum advantage of in-class instruction. "The college instructors are trying very hard to make it a longer program but we can't shake the money loose," says Selma.

Selma and Judy's dedication to child care extends beyond the scope of their paid jobs. Judy was one of the people responsible for developing local child care services and both have maintained a commitment to local programs by serving on advisory committees and boards of directors for the Infant Development Program and the Kootenay Columbia Child Care Society. They travel to local child care centres, pre-school and play groups to place and assess their students during their practicums, and can provide a good overview of the services available and the problems.

They recognize Nelson's Family Day Care organization as being "one of the best in the country," and Judy bluntly states, "There aren't any more like it because government doesn't want to put money into it. We have the services we do have because people are dedicated enough to give their services at sub-minimal costs."

That is the key word throughout  
continued on page 16



“. . . The English Language. . . seems to me positively and expressly *masculine*, it is the language of a grown-up man and has very little childish or feminine about it.”—*Otto Jespersen, Growth and Structure of the English Language*, (1905).

“A language is not merely a means of communication; it is also an expression of shared assumptions. Language transmits implicit values and behavioral models to all those people who use it.” *Guidelines for the equal treatment of the sexes in social studies textbooks* — Elizabeth Burr, Susan Dunn and Norma Farquar (California, 1972).

I work with a young woman who refers to herself and our co-workers as “girls.” All of them are in their late twenties or thirties, but she sees nothing odd in this. She never calls a man of this age a “boy,” and if she did it would be an insult.

I have been exploring the ways women are described in everyday language and comparing it with the words used for men. I am beginning to see the underlying assumptions in the treatment of both sexes and I am hopeful that there are some signs of change.

#### Woman as object

Language makes women into objects; there are very few equivalent words for men. For instance, women may be compared to food: honey, sugar, cookie, peaches and cream, tarts, sugar and spice. There are probably more; the only male example I could think of was sugar-daddy. Women may be linked to flowers: clinging vines and shrinking violets and wallflowers. There are all those pretty flower names like Lily, Rose or Flora. No one calls their son after flowers or even trees. Women may be compared with animals: cats, kittens, bitches, dogs, cows or chicks. They even wear pig-tails, pony-tails or halters. Men may be studs or pigs perhaps, but these are stronger images.

Language makes women into objects by denigrating them: there are far more terms of abuse for women than there are for men. Most of them have sexual undertones: loose woman, fallen woman, tramp, floozy, woman of ill-repute. Many words for women were once perfectly respectable but have come down in the world. Slut, for instance, was once used for both sexes; virago relates to the latin *vir* meaning man, and surviving also in virtuous. Harlot originally meant ‘rascal’ and applied only to men; it gradually changed its meaning to apply only to women. Shrew, in the 13th century meant ‘a wicked, evil-disposed or malignant man,’ and was used to refer to

## What's in a name? Women and language

by Angela Page

the Devil. It gradually weakened its meaning to ‘rascal’ or Villain,’ but extended to include women given to scolding. It now applies exclusively to women.

Language also makes women into objects by defining them physically: only women have figures or are stacked; only women are blondes or redheads. Only women are cute, petite, well-built or pert. Men are described in terms of their achievements, not their looks. They are not usually defined in terms of their spouses or families as women are.

Language defines women sexually, or infantilises them by using childish words for adult females. Can you imagine a man being called a playmate, a baby, a plain John, a cover boy?

#### Women rendered invisible

The English language makes woman invisible; it ignores her existence. We are expected to use the word ‘men’ in two interchangeable ways. One is the term for the masculine half of the human race, but we are also expected to understand the term ‘men’ to include women. Countless textbooks have covered the history and development of ‘mankind,’ with an occasional kindly reference to woman’s contribution in the home. The TV series *The Ascent of Man*, about the evolution of the species, began with a shot of a male baby taking his first step and a male athlete running. What is a little girl to think?

There is a gradual recognition that phraseology can make a difference to understanding. One study of high school students showed that, if asked to draw primitive man, they drew men only. If asked to draw primitive people or primitive men and women they drew both sexes.

Any woman knows that ‘man overboard’ may mean a woman; ‘manslaughter,’ Manpower, or even workmen’s compensation includes her, but the sign ‘Men Only’ stops her in her tracks.

Children often find these distinctions very confusing, both in relation to people — why is the Avon lady not a man if men means people? — and to animals. Most of them are presumed male, unless proved otherwise. ‘The groundhog won’t see his shadow today,’ says the newscaster. A national brand of oatmeal with animal pictures on the packaging shows a bull moose, a male caribou, three big horn rams, some indeterminate bears, chipmunks and wolves. There are no animals with young and no hint that females exist. In the animal world, only ladybugs, cows and hens are seen as female. Even the Loch Ness monster is presumed male; scientists have tried to lure ‘him’ to the surface with an artificial female monster.

#### The naming of women

Another way of making women invisible is through their names. They disappear on marriage as though they had never existed. Have you ever looked for a friend’s phone number when you’ve forgotten her husband’s name? There is a trend away from this, but it is not generally known, even now, that women do not legally have to change their names on marriage.

*Words and Women*, by Casey Miller and Kate Swift, has a very interesting chapter on women and their names.

The media treat men’s and women’s names quite differently: Reagan and Nancy, Trudeau and Margaret. First names are used for inferiors: children, women, servants. Women’s names are less important than men’s: that is why they follow them.

Women’s names are very often diminutives of men’s: Georgina, Josephine, Erica, Adrienne. Children are called after their fathers, not mothers. If a couple named Henrietta and Frank called their son Henry, he could probably relate back to the original Henry for whom Henrietta was named.

Then there are the unisex names: Shirley, Beverley, Leslie, Evelyn, were often surnames originally, then used for male first names. Once they were used for women they became somehow considered unsuitable names for men. The same thing happened, in English if not other languages, with names relating to qualities like Charity, Constance, Patience which have no male equivalent; though names like Robert mean ‘bright fame’ and Michael means ‘like God.’ Men’s names tend to be shortened: Tom,

continued on page 12 →



"For the women and men who defeated the old Nicaragua. . . and all those who with their lives are creating the new one."

This is the story of Nicaraguan women, in their own words, from interviews conducted shortly after the popular revolution of July 19, 1979.

The "old Nicaragua" Margaret Randall refers to in her dedication is the Nicaragua of dictator Anastasio Somoza and his predecessors of the same name. The Somoza tyranny dated back to 1933. Nicaragua's long tradition of resistance dates back to 1955, however, when U.S. domination began.

The country's national hero is General Augusto Cesar Sandino, who began a drive against U.S. marines in 1927 which succeeded in 1933. A year later Somoza's henchmen murdered Sandino and slaughtered hundreds of Nicaraguans.

The women creating the "new Nicaragua" are proud to be "Sandino's Daughters," and the Sandinista National Liberation Front, which led the Revolution and heads it today, bears his name.

#### Testimonies

"I have nine children. Or should I say, had nine children; one died in the war. I had two sons and seven daughters. Monica was the first to get involved. By the third year of high school she was already participating in school activities for grievances, for the political prisoners, in the teachers strike, the milk strike, and others. She was only thirteen then. . ."

"My mom died when I was thirteen. She had sixteen children. . . my dad married another woman and abandoned us completely. So I had to go out to work right away. . . I'll tell you, I never set foot in a school because I had to work. . . I only began to read and write after I got involved in the struggle."

"That's the way they (National Guard) treated all the peasant women they picked up; they raped them and tortured them and committed atrocities. It was just three days, but those three days were like three years to me — three years of being raped by those animals."

Three women with different stories. Taken alone, any one of them tells enough to appreciate why Nicaraguans fought so long to free themselves of Somoza.

*Sandino's Daughters* covers the experiences of women from many backgrounds and ages: working and peasant women in their vast majority; bourgeois and middle class women; women who are central leaders of the FSLN today, all driven to unite to defeat the dictatorship.

#### BOOK REVIEW

## Sandino's Daughters



### Testimonies of Nicaraguan Women in Struggle

by Margaret Randall  
New Star Books  
2504 York Avenue  
Vancouver, B.C. V6K 1E3  
220 pages, paperback, \$7.95

Reviewed by Monica Jones

#### Youth

Young women in particular joined the struggle. Ana Julia Guido joined the FSLN when she was fourteen. "My involvement grew out of the poverty so many of us suffered. . . Oh, I couldn't analyze it like that then, but I felt it all right. . . for me joining the Front was a logical consequence of everything happening around me."

Juana Galo joined the Movement of Junior High School Students. She became a commander after her group leader was killed. At the time of her interview she was taking a company and battalion leaders' course. "I love army life. Being

here I can do everything possible for reconstruction and for our people. As long as I live, I want to serve them."

Carmen Azucena Rodriguez Prado joined the National Guard to help support her family. Every other job required high school but the Guard required only junior high education.

Carmen met an FSLN prisoner she was guarding and ultimately joined the FSLN. She took on the dangerous task of working for the revolution within the Guard. "At first I worked as a messenger, later I'd steal insignias, uniforms, arms and ammunition. I always had to be on guard. I even had to watch myself on the street. I could have easily been a target for an FSLN comrade. I couldn't say to anyone, 'Look, I'm really on your side.'"

#### Role of the Catholic Church

The progressive movement within the Catholic Church actively supported social change under Somoza. Priests and nuns acted as mediators between the FSLN and the Guard.

Sister Martha was threatened by the Guard and had to leave Nicaragua in 1978. "When a guard told Mother Pilar that I was being paid by the international communist movement my response was 'If the church is communist because it struggles for justice, well I guess that makes me a communist.'"

#### AMNLAE

Today, Nicaraguan women are organized in the Association of Nicaraguan Women, Luisa Amanda Espinosa (AMNLAE), after the first FSLN woman militant to die in battle. She was killed in 1970. She was 21.

"The last time I saw her she hugged her sisters and told us she was going away," Luisa's mother remembers. "It must have been a month later that her picture came out in the papers. A photograph of a man and a young woman — dead. I said to myself, 'Good God, they killed them. . . how horrible.' But I didn't recognize her."

Gloria Carrion is the General Coordinator of AMNLAE and is charged with the task of integrating women into the long-range process of reconstruction and change. She spoke of how many women came to be involved in the struggle. "The widespread repression, and in particular, the way this repression centred on our youth, outraged women from all classes. The repression was so bad that it was a crime just to be young."

Today, women are highly visible in the military, the unions and in the FSLN. Female "brigadistas" participated



# El Salvador: women's changing role and status

by Cheryl Pruitt

When Oscar Dada, political representative in Canada for the El Salvador Revolutionary Democratic Front (FDR) spoke to a group of New Democrats in Vancouver in February, he responded as follows to a question about the role of women in the liberation struggle.

"A very sad and cruel way to under-

stand the part women are playing in our struggle is to look at the lists of the dead and disappeared. You will see the names of many women who participated side by side with the men and died alongside them too.

There is no activity or level of the struggle in which women are not in-

involved. In fact, and I say this seriously, women are viewed as being the most courageous and daring. Women are viewed with deep respect for their role in the struggle. Women participate in all areas — the diplomatic force, the political leadership, and the armed units, in addition to support services for the fighters.

El Salvador has always had a problem with machismo — in fact, we still do. But the experience of common struggle has changed the situation radically. There are daily examples of this. Relationships between men and women have changed enormously. When you see women and men fighting together, sacrificing themselves in the same ways, it changes your outlook. Our country won't be the same as it was before. El Salvador can never go back to what life was like before our struggle. Not after fighting and risking our lives together. There has been a significant and inspiring change in all areas of our lives." ♀

## SANDINO'S DAUGHTERS continued from page 11

actively in the successful literacy campaign conducted in 1980.

Melania Davila took a job as a waitress. It turned out they wanted a prostitute, not a waitress, and like many other women in the old Nicaragua, that was the only way she could support her children. "I look older than thirty-nine because I've worked hard all my life and have suffered a lot. I'm tired of washing and ironing. . . There are new possibilities for everyone. I had to learn to read and write all on my own but now I can go to school. Now even women will be able to study."

Nora Astorga is Special Attorney General in new Nicaragua. She is charged with bringing to justice ex-guards and other functionaries of the Somoza regime. She was instrumental in the execution of a particularly brutal National Guard general before the revolution.

Nora sums up where Nicaraguan women are heading. "We won't ever let ourselves be isolated from society. We see this in our women's association — those women are tremendous fighters. Women were of crucial importance in the insurrectional struggle and we know that we — who are 51% of the population — are vital to our country's — and our own development today."

One added feature worth noting is the marvellous photographs Randall took to accompany the interviews. She captured the strength of these women — almost always smiling — for they have confidence in their revolution and their people. ♀

## WHAT'S IN A NAME? WOMEN AND LANGUAGE Continued from page 10

Ed, Joe, Bill. Women's names are longer, softer, more 'feminine:' Sheryl, Pamela, Linda, Laura, Jenny, Sharlene.

### Word order and importance

While women's names tend to emphasize their secondary position, gentleness, passivity, the order of words also underlines their inferiority. Consider: husband and wife, father and mother, man and woman, his and hers. Then we have forefathers, men working, a man-sized job contrasted with women's work. There are the different connotations of master/mistress, landlord/landlady, wizard/witch, bachelor/old maid. We husband our resources but although the word 'wife' originally meant woman, we now attach it only to husbands, houses or fish.

There are dozens of examples of the masculine word being more important than the feminine word: we have craftsmen and women, but only craftsmanship; postmasters and postmistresses but only a postmaster-general. Some of us would like to be spinsters, not bachelors, of arts. A tailor does much the same work as a seamstress, but which has more prestige and higher pay? There are old masters but not old mistresses. And on, and on.

In fact, the word 'mistress' originally meant a woman who had control, first of a household, later of a man's heart; it has only had its present sexual meaning since the 17th century. Shakespeare's Mistress Quickly was insulted at being

called a woman: she was mistress of her tavern and deserved respect. The word woman, too, has mixed meanings: the French Lieutenant's woman was a social outcast, but I think it is preferable to be called a woman than a girl, a lady, a little woman or an old lady. In Anglo-Saxon times a lady meant someone who kneaded bread, but we now see her as a restricted person who keeps her knees together in public and certainly doesn't swear like a fishwife.

The changing images of words show that language is alive and developing. New words, like chairperson, herstory, or expressions like Mothers of Confederation sound ridiculous at first but gradually become acceptable. Others, like poetess or authoress, are mercifully becoming obsolete. The use of Ms. is increasing, at least on paper if not in speech, and much of the time we do not bother with styles like Mr. or Mrs. at all. Books like Robin Lakoff's *Language and Women's Place* and two by Casey Miller and Kate Swift, *Words and Women*, and the recent *Handbook of Nonsexist Writing* (Lippincott & Crowell, New York), all increase our awareness. They are also very readable.

But reading is not enough. Every time we point out that an adult woman is not a girl, or consciously alter our word order — women and men, children and women — we are making small changes in this masculine language we all use and live with, and hopefully improving our own and our children's chances of equality. ♀



The problems of child abuse and neglect evolve from a complex interaction of events and processes and a multi-faceted approach to intervention is necessary.

Child neglect is often a function of lack of money or education. Often families are responsive to being taught good child care and would willingly care for their children if they had the resources. The occurrence of child abuse is also precipitated by external stresses on the family. In many cases this can be lack of money, poor housing, unsatisfying jobs, inadequate day care, etc. Such issues require intervention in the economic and political spheres.

It is important to see the whole family as needing assistance and not focus on the child as the victim of uncaring or inadequate parents. A comprehensive plan for a family might include the use of day care or after-school programs to separate parent and child at times, marital counselling, teaching of child management skills, and teaching of ways to handle anger and frustration. Reducing the social isolation of many of these families is important.

#### North Vancouver program

Chesterfield House in North Vancouver is one resource directed towards treatment and prevention of child abuse and neglect. This program has been operating on a part-time basis for many years under the auspices of St. John's Church, North Shore Family Services, and the Junior League. The focus has been on open-ended support groups for parents with child-minding for children. With recent funding from the ministry of Human Resources, we have expanded to a full-time, more comprehensive service.

We are fortunate in having a charming old house in a central location. There is a well-equipped playroom, crowded but cozy kitchen, and meeting rooms and office space upstairs. The staff consists of social workers, child care workers, and a secretary who keeps us organized.

We serve families who have been abusive or neglectful as well as many families at risk for these problems. People come to us through their MHR social worker, public health nurse, family physician, school counsellor, etc., or on their own. We work mostly with families of pre-schoolers and have an evening group suitable for children up to 12 years old.

The rationale for the program is to provide therapeutic support for the parents, teach parenting skills, provide a caring and stimulating children's program, and lessen the intensity of the parent-child relationship when appropriate.

## Help for parents to stop child abuse

by Susan Irwin



There are a variety of activities designed to achieve these goals.

There are two day-long groups, one meeting once a week and the other twice a week. Families are here from 9:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. The morning is spent on family activities, often with an outing to the park, the library, Granville market, the zoo, etc. It's a time to discover new places and have a good time. It's also a time to assess the parent-child relationship and for staff to model and coach good child management. There are opportunities for great informal talks.

After lunch the support group meets.

This is the time to share feelings and work on problems in a concentrated way. There is a lot of mutual support and self-help.

The twice-a-week group has a parenting skills class in the morning and mother's time out in the afternoon. That is time for crafts, swimming, or a trip for adults only. It's a time for women to enjoy themselves, without their children around.

There are also other parent support groups meeting each week. Another service is the Monday afternoon drop-off. Anyone in the program may leave her children here for 3 hours, giving her a break and time to herself.

An additional component of the service is the parent-aid volunteer program. Those parents who so wish are matched with a volunteer who is a resident of the community and often has a family herself. The volunteer can be a friendly neighbour — someone to telephone, have coffee with, seek advice from, go for lunch with. Everyone develops their unique relationships.

#### Mostly women come

It is mostly women who come to Chesterfield House, yet about half these families have men too. It is women who are the primary caregivers to children and men seldom come to us for help. But we would like to reach these men as well, so we are developing a new program. This will be an evening meeting once a month for men and women with a presentation on some aspect of parenting followed by discussion. We hope a low-key approach will be appealing and we will reach more of these parents.

While our concern is preventing and addressing the problem of child abuse/neglect, much of our focus is on meeting the needs of parents. Many times these people did not receive the care and attention they should have and as children. They may not have the support they need as adults. They must be nurtured now. They need people to rely on who are non-judgemental. They need support as they grow emotionally. They need a warm, friendly atmosphere and a chance to meet new people so they feel less alone.

Parents also learn about child development and effective ways of handling discipline. This is not only through talk but also by getting help in an immediate situation through the course of the day. They learn useful ways to handle feelings and how to help their children grow.

When parents have some of their own needs met, when they learn how to cope, and when they have social support, then they are more able to care for their children effectively and safely.



When Julie Brickman, a Clinical Psychologist specializing in violence against women, talks to a group about incest, the first thing she does is get rid of the myths surrounding incest.

In a recent seminar for professionals on *Sexual Abuse Within the Family* sponsored by the Justice Institute of B.C., she started with the most basic of myths:

— Myth: There is a strong bias against incest in our society.

— Reality: Incest is almost commonplace — one out of every four children in our society experiences some kind of sexual abuse. And between 96 and 99 per cent of all offenders are male, regardless of the gender of the victim. The bias in our society is against *talking* about incest. Our society perpetuates the problem of incest by misinterpreting its causes and effects and, in many cases, ignoring its existence.

"The statistics are horrifying," says Julie, "but they are not the important thing to focus on. Incest must be recognized for what it is — part of the sanctioned power structure in our society. Like rape, incest is a form of violence perpetrated by a powerful person on someone less powerful. Nothing demonstrates the use of the male organ as a weapon more clearly than the damage done to a small child. The problem is power, not sexuality.

"Incest deprives the victim of the rights of dignity and autonomy over her own body. The victim's rights and her very survival become contingent on the person in power. The issue is power, the arena is sexual."

#### Further myths

— Myth: Our rape and incest laws are designed to offer protection to women and children.

— Reality: Our laws are designed to protect the value of male property and women have always been regarded as the sexual property of their fathers and husbands.

— Myth: Incest is a disturbance in the functioning of the family unit.

— Reality: The disturbance is a consequence of the incest, not the cause. We must keep in mind who did what to whom and the bottom line is the rights of the victim, not the "sanctity of the family unit."

Julie tackled a whole set of myths that attempt to place the blame on women and children for the violence that is done to them by husbands and fathers.

— Myth: If father and mother had a normal sex life, father wouldn't commit incest.

## The mythology of incest

by Jo Dunaway Lazenby

— Reality: This is irrelevant. It is an attempt to place the blame for family problems on the mother and view the father as one of the victims. There are many other solutions to marital and sexual problems besides raping one's daughter.

This is also bound up with another myth — that of the great male sex drive and his right to satisfy it however he can.

Incest, like rape, is a problem of violence and force, not sexuality.

— Myth: Mothers often unconsciously encourage incest in order to evade their responsibilities as wives.

— Reality: Again irrelevant. A mother does not think that if there are problems between her and her husband he will then molest their daughter. Many mothers are absolutely shocked when they learn of incest in the family. And the need of the mother for crisis counselling at this time is often overlooked. She feels that not only has she failed as a wife and mother, but is now expected to take charge of resolving all the problems which resulted. She feels anger, guilt, hatred, betrayal, confusion, revulsion.

#### Social permission

— Myth: External stresses lead men to become so frustrated that they take it out on their families, especially on their wives and female children.

— Reality: This theory gives social permission to acts of violence like rape and incest. It says that when a man is

under stress it is understandable for him to brutalize someone else. This theory fails to explain why women under stress do not commit these crimes and why other men who are under stress do not either.

— Myth: Growing up in a violent home makes one more likely to use violence as a problem-solving technique when one is an adult.

— Reality: The cycle-of-violence theory is dangerous because it provides an easy explanation. But it does not deal with questions like: why men and not women? What about people who grow up in violent homes and do not rape children? What about people who did not grow up in violent homes and do rape children? Again, it is important that we focus on the victim and not be distracted by all the problems of the attacker.

— Myth: All men who commit incest (or rape) display some form of psychopathology (craziness).

— Reality: We like to think this. But these men do not have a problem as much as they are a problem. They inflict violence on vulnerable persons rather than handling their own problems and pain. The essence of victimization is to get someone else to carry your pain and anxiety.

— Myth: Some incest victims are so beautiful and seductive that it is only natural for a man, even a father, to be overwhelmingly attracted to them.

— Reality: This is the same mythology as rape — the tendency of society to sexualize women and young girls. Children are sensual, not sexual. If a child is acting in a very sexual way, it is probably because an adult has involved her in a sexual action.

— Myth: Many little children have sexual fantasies about their opposite-sex parent.

— Reality: This is one of our legacies from Freud which Florence Rush deals with in her book *The Best Kept Secret, Sexual Abuse of Children*.

Freud received so many reports from adult female patients of abuse as children — usually at the hands of their fathers — that he decided that there couldn't be that many fathers abusing their children. So he changed the reports. (We know, of course, that Freud had a few problems himself). His explanation was that children were desiring their parents and having incest fantasies.

This theory is very dangerous because it leads us to disbelieve what a child is trying to tell us. And if no one confirms your perceptions, then you don't trust your perceptions. We make people crazy by telling them that what they perceive does not exist.



# Victim carries the guilt

by Laurel M. Smith Dow

Sylvia (an alias) is a survivor. She suffered in a home where her brother sexually abused her. Now, at 26 with a child of her own, she is seeking help to deal with the guilt that has been repressed all these years.

Sylvia lived in a home where her stepmother was in need of psychiatric care — she blamed the children for imagined wrongs. Her father, determined to protect his professional status in the community, would not admit that his wife had mental problems.

"He drilled into us that if anyone said anything about what was happening in our family, he would lose his position in the community." Thus the danger of destroying the family, socially and economically, was held over her head.

The tragedy was that others in the community did not take action when she would arrive at school with a badly bruised face and scratched arms.

"I knew if I told anyone what was happening I'd just get it worse," she said. "The worst was when my school principal took me aside and told me 'We



know what is going on in your home but we can't do anything about it because of your father's position."

This situation was allowed to exist for years because friends, relatives, neighbours, teachers, all chose not to believe the signs of child abuse when they saw them.

## Shared by many

It happens all too often. Sylvia's story is shared by many women, some

## THE MYTHOLOGY OF INCEST

Continued from page 14



Having exposed some of the mythology surrounding incest what do we do to stop it?

"I don't have the answers," says Julie. "I'm still struggling with the questions. But I do know that every time we battle to make violence — whether it is physical, emotional or verbal violence — more visible, more exposed, we are taking a step forward. And I think it is important to keep in mind that the

changes that we make in our personal arenas are not just for our own comfort. They are what we bequeath to our daughters and grand-daughters. The day that the incest dynamic is eliminated from the nuclear family we will know that society has changed the way it looks at the state of being female.

"Trust is important — trust in our own instincts and perception of reality. And we must amplify this reality because it is always being run over by the definitions given to us by male-dominated disciplines such as psychology which are designed to shore up the existing structure of society." ♀

Books that deal with incest in the context of power:

*The Best Kept Secret, Sexual Abuse of Children*, Florence Rush.

*Female Sexual Slavery*, Kathleen Burry

of whom have remained silent for years.

In September, a workshop was held in Courtenay for women who are trying to help each other deal with problems like Sylvia's. The Human Resources Office deals with individual cases of incest if they are reported — usually by the abused children themselves. The office is so understaffed that, as far as I know, the only action is usually to try to remove the child from the home.

A social worker referred me to Linda Halliday as someone to contact for help in the Courtenay area. Linda, herself a victim of incest for years, single-handedly started a group called Sexually Abused Victims Anonymous (SAVA). She describes abuse as "any trust relationship between a child and an adult where fondling, molesting or sexual intercourse occurs."

Halliday's work with SAVA, which receives no financial aid from any government agency — "just a pat on the back" — includes lectures, workshops, and counselling for offenders and families. The group tries to deal with the humiliation and guilt that the victims feel. One woman drives from Nanaimo to attend meetings. Another, now 67 years old, is finally dealing with her guilt about being abused as a child.

Linda says that the pattern for victims often includes "running away, self-mutilation, and self-abuse through drugs or alcohol. They have such a low opinion of themselves that they feel they deserve the worst. Many end up in battering relationships or selling sex for a living. Many attempt suicide." One little girl in Halliday's group tried to cut her stomach open with a broken bottle.

Since its beginning in February, 1980, the SAVA group has dealt with 91 victims from the Campbell River-Courtenay area. Of that, 79 were female and 12 were male. All the offenders, except four, were male.

Linda has found the high risk age to be eight years old for girls and about twelve years for boys. The majority of the child victims had been molested by more than one person. And the child abuser usually molested more than one child.

In one case, "There was an offender who had seventeen victims in one family and no one had reported him. It wasn't until one mother realized that he might molest her daughter that the evidence came out." Silence is dangerous.

One of the reasons that so few victims report the one who abuses them is that often the young person loves the person and believes "If you tell on me I'll really be in trouble." Thus the child is blackmailed into protecting the molester. ♀



WHEREAS the current maternity provisions for women workers in Canada are woefully inadequate; and

WHEREAS the bearing and raising of children is a social as well as an individual responsibility; and

WHEREAS under the UI Act women who take maternity leave are eligible to receive only 60% of their earnings to a maximum of \$210 per week (as of January, 1982; and

WHEREAS legislation in Canada is discriminatory and inadequate regarding paternity leave, a situation which discourages fathers from fully participating in the care and raising of their children and

WHEREAS the provision of fully paid parental leave is a fact of life in most European countries. (In Sweden, parental leave can be shared by either parent, at 90% of salary for 9 months. Provisions also exist to make work hours more flexible for parents of young children. In East Germany, workers are entitled to 100% of earnings for 20 weeks. In France, workers are eligible for 16 weeks at 90% of salary for the first two children and 26 weeks for the third and subsequent children, and the recent introduction of paid maternity leave legislation in Ireland means that all EEC

#### DEDICATION AND FRUSTRATION Continued from page 9

this story — dedication. Just how much longer can we expect to rely on such personal sacrifices to provide critically needed services? Many of these people have been at it for years and are frankly getting tired. The dedication is still there, but years of after-hours meetings, endless fund-raising efforts and hopscotching through the various government agencies take their toll. Ad hoc, improvise, make do — why should such vital services have to be operated in such a manner?

I applauded the decision at the last B.C. NDP Convention to remove Child Care from the sole responsibility of the Women's Rights Committee and place it in the Education arena where it belongs. Children are everyone's business and a cohesive effort must be made to attend to all their needs, and the needs of their beleaguered parents.

Child care, infant development workers, assessment centres, physiotherapists and many other services should be as well organized and readily available as the public school system. It's just a question of priorities. To quote Selma Sheldon's assessment of the whole situation: "What we need most is a change of government." ♀

## Resolution on Parental Leave and Unemployment Insurance

Adopted by the  
NDP Federal Council  
January 22-24, 1982

countries, including Greece and Spain, have protective provisions for parental rights.); and

WHEREAS Canada, as a signator to the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the ILO Convention "Workers with Family Responsibilities" is obliged to implement measures to prevent discrimination against women on the grounds of marriage or maternity;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the NDP endorse the following provisions respecting parental leave and maternity benefits:

1. Nine months paid leave-of-absence at no loss of pay which may be shared by both parents, adoptive as well as natural parents.

2. Accumulation of seniority and all benefits during the period of parental leave; where benefits are employer/employee shared the employer's share shall be maintained by the employer.

3. The right to return to the same job or its equivalent with no loss of credits.

4. Protection of reproductive capacities and the fetus from potential workplace hazards with provision for temporary transfer to another job during pregnancy without loss of seniority, pay or benefits.

5. Provision for minimum of 10 days per year paid leave of absence for parental responsibilities.

6. The amendment of the UI Act and of all labour codes to eliminate restrictive provisions affecting parental leave and maternity benefits in order that persons with family responsibilities may exercise their right to employment without discrimination. ♀

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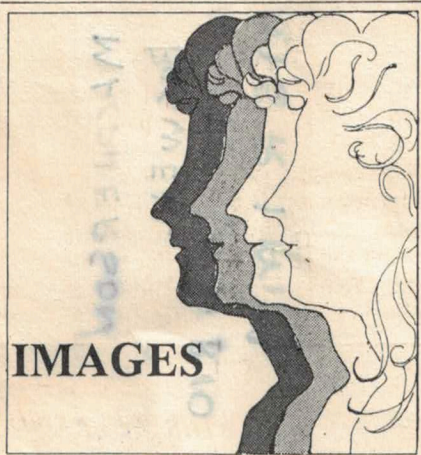
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