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BROTHERHOOD OF ST. LAURENCE
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ARCHIVES

SEMINAR PROCEEDINGS

LESSONS FROM THE FAMILY CENTRE PROJECT

NOVEMBER 1987

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PLACE OF SEMINAR: AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF FAMILY STUDIES,
MELBOURNE

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS:

1. **Chairperson** - Jan Carter, Director of Social Policy and Research Centre (BSL)
2. **Main speakers** in order of appearance (and relevant position held).

Peter Hollingworth - Director of Social Services (BSL) 1972;
Currently Executive Director (BSL)

Hayden Raysmith - Co-ordinator of ARC, 1976-1978.

Ruby Canham - Co-ordinator of ARC, from 1985 (current)

Michael Liffman - Research staff person in FCP, 1972-1975.

Jan King - Co-ordinator of ARC, 1981-1985.

David Green - Director of Community Services (BSL), 1981-1986

Connie Benn - Co-ordinator of FCP, 1972-1975

Don Edgar - Director of the Australian Institute of Family
Studies

Jean McCaughey - Author of book on low income families and BSL
Board member

Len Tierney - Lecture in Social Studies, Melbourne University

David Scott - Director of BSL during FCP

3. Other contributors to the debate (in order of appearance)

Ray Walters - FCP member, indigenous worker in FCP,
and youth worker in ARC

David Brous - Research worker at ARC in mid-seventies

Sue Kirkguard - Family services worker in Careforce, and BSL
Board member

4. Other BSL staff

Mary D'Aprano - Material Aid (BSL) and support worker in FCP and ARC

Norma Hampton - Limurru (BSL) and support worker in FCP and ARC

Adrian Harris - Executive Officer, Peninsula Division, BSL

Graeme Bound - Executive Officer, Geelong Division, BSL

John Wise - Director of Community Services, BSL

Ross McAuley - Chaplain, BSL

Justin McDermott, Jenny Trethewey - Research Officers, Social Policy and Research Centre, BSL

Limurru (now Napier Street) staff, BSL

Organisers of seminar - Tim Gilley (Social Policy and Research Centre, BSL)
Ian Gardner (Social work student in Social Policy and Research Centre, BSL)

5. Other ARC staff/members

Nancy Raphael (staff)

Judith Perrin (staff)

Gladys Shears (ARC member and original FCP member)

Pat Parker (staff member and original FCP member)

6. Others

Barry Martin - Chairperson - BSL Board

Rob Hudson - Youth worker (ARC) and currently director of VCOSS

FORMAT OF THIS DOCUMENT

The format of the document is to provide an edited version of the twelve main speakers at the seminar, in the order in which they spoke. This is then followed by an edited version of the five discussion periods during the seminar, together with Peter Hollingworth's concluding remarks.

ABBREVIATIONS

BSL - BROTHERHOOD OF ST LAURENCE
ARC - ACTION RESOURCE CENTRE
FCP - FAMILY CENTRE PROJECT

EDITOR - Tim Gilley, with assistance from Ian Gardner in the early stages.

TYPING - Janet Kleva and Tim Gilley

FOREWORD

The essential reason for holding this seminar was to assist the Brotherhood in thinking about what services it should be offering to families on low incomes, through a better understanding of the lessons from the Family Centre and ARC.

The method chosen was to bring together key staff who had worked in the Family Centre Project, in the Brotherhood of St Laurence, in ARC (past and present) together with some outsiders with expertise in the family services area.

As Peter Hollingworth, Executive Director of the BSL, explained the purpose of the seminar:

We have resources. We have come to one of those points at Limurru historically where the chance is to develop new structures, new directions, and maybe new objectives...It represents one of those important historic opportunities that don't come more than once about every twenty or thirty years. So I think it is quite right to ask ourselves what we can learn from this important experience in the Family Centre and ARC, and how do we start to apply those messages and lessons into the process of restructuring Limurru Family and Neighbourhood Services and the direction that they go.

The seminar also provided the opportunity for new senior staff in the BSL to become more closely acquainted with some of the history of Brotherhood services which has been so influential in the development of some of its current operations.

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1. JAN CARTER - INTRODUCTION

I'd like to welcome you to a follow-up seminar on the Family Centre Project (FCP) and I would like to begin really by thanking the Australian Institute of Family Studies for the generous use of their facilities.

Purpose of seminar

The purpose of the day is to do some really active reflection on the Family Centre Project in terms of the lessons we need to learn from it.

There are a great number of new staff at the Brotherhood, many of whom are in senior positions, for whom the Family Centre Project looms in the past as a very significant motif in the Brotherhood's operations. Because none of us had the chance to be there and because we are considering in some detail at the moment our responses to families in poverty in relation to both income support and family support, it seems very appropriate that those of us who are new should try to understand the process of the Family Centre.

I think also that we've designed this day as a counter balancing way to a project that is being planned in Social Policy and Research Centre at the moment which is really a consumer view of the Family Centre. We are trying to follow up the original families to ask them what they really got out of being members of the Family Centre. It seems that because of this follow-up work it was quite a good idea to collect together people who worked in the Family Centre to be able to provide a perceptive from the staff and work point of view.

Political context

I think that this seminar takes place at quite a significant time. Unlike the time when the Family Centre was established, we have a very significant increase in child poverty. We are grappling I think with responses to these increases in child poverty. We have seen in the past six months the Prime Minister's Family Assistance package, but I think that the direction that this society takes to families in need is still a very open question.

Looking at the structure of today's seminar, we want to attempt at all times to think about the past as it relates to the present. Towards the end of the day we may, if we have time and energy, grapple with the future.

For those not involved in Family Centre Project

Those who were involved in the Family Centre Project probably need to remember that, for those of us who weren't there, there were certain significant factors that the FCP spelt out to us that are perhaps quite different. One of the things that the Family Centre Project means to me is the Brotherhood's willingness to undertake innovation, to try new things.

I was very intrigued as I flew around Australia to find out the extent to which the innovations of the FCP have become institutionalised in social welfare thinking. The dissemination of the Family Centre as an innovation has been really quite remarkable. That is not really what we are going to talk about today but it is a very interesting outcome.

The FCP also spelt out to me that the Brotherhood is willing to take risks, and I think that in the social welfare community that is not always a response that agencies are prepared to make. It meant that the Brotherhood was prepared to wear some conflict and I guess that those who have looked at the sociology of innovation know that nothing worthwhile ever happens in terms of change without a certain level of disagreement and conflict.

So those are the things that the Family Centre Project has meant to someone who was not involved. I am sure everybody has their own perspective on the Family Centre and perhaps one of the interesting things about today will be the way that they emerge.

Now what I would like to do now is to hand over to Peter who is going to talk a little bit about the social and political climate facing low income families today. It really is a scene setter.

2. PETER HOLLINGWORTH

What is the the current social/political climate facing low income families today?

Thanks Jan.

This has been an opportunity for me to do some fairly deep thinking about the genesis of how the Family Centre all began. As I sorted this out last night I concluded that it would be useful just to remind ourselves of certain events that took place in our society some twenty years or so ago, for that was the scene for the development of this new proposal.

So I want to begin by taking a historical look because I don't think anybody else is quite going to do that and then we can build on it.

Overseas developments

I suppose I have to take responsibility for this whole thing happening. As I thought about how it all began my thoughts went back to 1967 when I went overseas. That was a critical year, because it was the time when change was most evident in modern democratic society, as I saw it in Paris in the students race riots, as I saw it in Germany, and then when we lived in the United States in New York and Chicago in the heart of it all. There were a number of themes around the place. There were of course the Urban Race Riots which were a push toward achieving civil rights for blacks. There was the emergence of black power which was really taking over from the earlier civil rights movement of Martin Luther King. There was the whole student unrest and the focus on participatory democracy as distinct from representative democracy.

It was in the United States a great time for digging back into the roots of the democratic tradition and understanding what things like civil rights actually meant. Words like citizen participation and decision making, equality, and equality of opportunity, were all part of the resurgent move towards the establishment of political, economic, social and civil rights. That is the context in which the thinking of the Family Centre first began.

I also want to stress that this happened in times of economic abundance. I do think, with the benefit of hindsight, that we are able to think and act in somewhat more progressive and radical ways when the resources are there to allow us to do it.

Brotherhood context

In 1967 I came back to Australia and in 1969 undertook social work and completed that at Melbourne University. In 1970, when David Scott was appointed as Director of the Brotherhood, I was appointed as one of the Associate Directors responsible for Social Services. During that early period we were very much focussed on issues of poverty and were all involved in working towards the establishment of a poverty inquiry. We were sensitive to the fact that there was a significant political shift taking place, where many of these kinds of ideas were beginning to impact in their own distinctive ways upon Australian society. I believed, and still believe, that you can't transfer practices but that ideas are transportable. I believe those ideas were a fundamental part of the early thinking prior to the establishment of the Family Centre.

Now what was happening. Within the Brotherhood in the 1970 there was a certain restlessness. Restlessness amongst the social workers that the old ways of dealing with low income families were not working, a sense that they were not achieving anything very much and that there was no change. I think in that as well was a sense that casework somehow didn't work very well with low income families.

On returning back to the Brotherhood there was this new broom syndrome that one always has. There was this sense of dissatisfaction and change in the air. It was also one of those times when people who have been around for quite a long time moved on to other things, and therefore new spaces opened up to think more creatively about where we might go in the future.

When I sat down with the staff to look at some of the issues in the services area, particularly those affecting families, the first thing that struck us all was that our Brotherhood services were pretty fragmented. Children's services, family services, and youth services didn't have anything much to do with one another. We were working with different parts of the same family, very often without any real interaction going on.

The first issue we addressed was the question of service fragmentation, to see how we could put together programs that were more holistic and focused upon the total family. I also think there was the sense of wanting to find more effective ways of dealing with what was still then called "multi-problem families". This is a term we try to avoid these days, but we are simply talking about families who didn't have a lot of the resources which most people regard as essential. The quest was for a total family approach which would enhance rather than fragment the lives of those families.

The new broom syndrome also suggested that we should try and explore new approaches to service delivery. We were interested in things like inter-disciplinary action and team approaches. In particular there was a commitment to using the resources of a small research department (one and a half positions) to the development of family services. So it was also an attempt to bring services and research and social action together in an inter-disciplinary framework.

Goals of FCP

In Michael Liffman's Power for the Poor, there is a listing of the goals for the families and I will quickly go over them. These were: to enhance the social functioning and the self-esteem of the families that we decided to work with, and in that there was an attempt to help them to view themselves in a different way; to see themselves as capable of achieving change within their own lives and not to be passive victims so called, but to be able to feel that they could exercise control over their lives and exercise some control over their external circumstances. The statement goals are a little ambivalent about changing external circumstances. I wasn't too sure about that one. I still think that there are certain things that are not very easily amenable to change that we have to deal with.

So really the emphasis was upon working with families, viewing them so they might view themselves as actors and participants rather than being acted upon and having things done to them. There was an emphasis upon the learning of skills per se, not only in dealing with external systems affecting their lives, but also in being able to manage their own lives more effectively.

So as far as goals for the program were concerned there were three things in it and there was something of a mix that needed drawing out. One of them is the shift from a kind of ameliorative approach to one of a participatory, developmental and treatment approach. Now the participatory approach obviously came straight from the civil rights movement. The developmental approach came pretty strongly from the social work tradition as did the treatment approach. In the original statement there was some ambivalence about the use of the word treatment and some qualification. I think that in subsequent years the Family Centre staff took that to mean professionals doing something to clients; something to do with the exercise of power by manipulating. Well that can be an interpretation of treatment but I do want to stress that treatment does have other meanings. It also refers to a mode of dealing with persons and things in the environment with a view to a result, by applying a defined process or doing something systematically in order to achieve change. It also means negotiating terms and conditions and I think it is more in that area that the use of the word treatment was applied.

When I thought back about what we were trying to do it seemed to me that the research question came down to this: to discover the extent to which family behaviour patterns can be shaped through the form of service and methodology that is used, and to determine which particular approaches and programs are appropriate or inappropriate in achieving certain goals. The goals were: family change, systemic management and change of public attitudes toward those families. Those are the three goals.

Now those original concepts were developed in terms of the concepts that you have in front of you in the paper which was circulated, with the following terms: empowerment, de-professionalisation, skill transfer, participation and transfer of resources.

Now I think that further down the track a number of other questions emerge out of those concepts which we haven't adequately addressed. I suppose to help draw some threads together my plea would be for some openness, frankness, and honesty in having a look at that experience. I don't think that it is in anybody's interest to cloak over anything that we might feel awkward talking about. We are all friends here. We have all been involved in a very significant series of events, and I think that if we can't be open and frank with one another here I can't imagine us doing it anywhere.

Empowerment

I would like to quickly list a number of things which I think do need addressing today and from here onwards. Firstly, there was the issue of empowerment. That phrase was never used in the original prescription but was a part of a second phase of development. I want to ask the question and keep on asking it, where is power ultimately vested? Under what circumstances is it conveyed? Who may exercise it and in whose interest? I think that it is a very difficult, a very potent, and a very potentially creative and destructive force, and I don't think that we have addressed it enough philosophically.

De-professionalisation

The second one of course is de-professionalisation. Unfortunately that got turned into anti-professionalism. I want to ask the question: what is it? It is that all of us continue to profess because that is what the term means. What are we professing, and what sort of things should we set aside and what sort of things should we maintain. I don't think we ever quite sorted that one out either.

Skills transfer

On the issue of skills transfer, we always have to recognise that in the building up of skills, and the transferring of skills, there is always the possibility of their misuse and their movement from their original intention and purposes. So the question there is in what circumstances can skills be transferred from one group of people to another. This is in a sense short-circuiting the whole process of socialisation, education, and all the rest. That remains for me an important unresolved question.

Participation was a fundamental motif setter. How can you exercise participation without responsibility, and there is again a question of whether we managed to maintain the balance there?

Finally, the **transfer of resources**, and to what ends? What goes with the transfer and the empowerment process, as I say, to counterbalance it.

Organisational autonomy

Perhaps just a couple of final thoughts that we might all talk about later during the day. A decision was made to give the Family Centre a high measure of organisational autonomy. Now the question we ought to reflect upon, particularly in relation to things that we might do in the future, is this: is it better when you are carrying out an innovation of this kind to make the organisation either totally independent or totally part of the organisation's service program? I have an open mind about that but I do think it is a question that needs fairly careful wrestling with. It certainly was something that got ARC, the successor of the Family Centre, and the Brotherhood into a lot of difficulty in the later years. It created an ambivalent sort of relationship which was not as organisationally defined as it might have been.

The second retrospective thought I have is that I think that the program at the outset was under-conceptualised, and I remember Len Tierney saying that and I think he was right. Probably we should have tried to pick up a few more of these issues and wrestled them through before we moved straight from the formulation of ideas into the implementation of programs.

Empowerment

The third question I'd like to wrestle with is the question of the empowerment strategy. There is a hunch that I still have that where you take a strategy of empowerment, and you put the emphasis there rather than somewhere else, it tends to mean that those people with greater capacity and greater natural ability relate to that program. Those who are less able and less

confident are often left behind or left out. I have a strong sense that that is one of the outcomes of programs of empowerment and I'd be very interested to hear what our ARC colleagues think about that.

Aboriginal people

There is one final thought that remains with me and that is, when our European forebears came here two hundred years ago, they were given some pretty clear instructions that they were not to just take things over from the original inhabitants. They were to treat with them and to negotiate with them and only to do it by mutual agreement. Of course we know that that didn't happen. But that there were some people who said, well we must try and work with the Aboriginal people by offering them the gifts of our European civilisation.

The history of the past two hundred years by and large is a story of the original people who steadfastly rejected all efforts, to a large degree, to civilise them, to bring into European ways, and instead preferred to maintain to their own tenuous and somewhat erratic forms of freedom and organisation. While I'm not suggesting that there is a direct analogy between what we are talking about today I do think there are some lessons that we need to learn and to look at. I suppose I have a strong commitment that people today, as then, have their own folk ways and their own ways of doing things. If the new ideas don't make sense they are going to resist them anyway and find their own ways through them. There are some important cultural questions and that too is one of the important issues that I would really like to see us wrestling with today.

3. HAYDEN RAYSMITH

What were the essential principles of the project and why are they worth keeping?

The origins of ARC: by faith out of frustration

The Action and Resource Centre for Low-Income Families is the product of forty years of frustration and four years of faith, hope and hard work.

It is built on the belief that the solution of poverty lies in changing the structure of society and proposes that this will be best done by giving disadvantaged families the power to change their own predicament.

Brotherhood context

As a voluntary welfare agency, the Brotherhood of St Laurence delivered services to the poor from the 1930s, employing professional social workers from 1953.

Services to families were delivered through the Social Work Service and the Youth and Children's Centre. During the 1960s, as many as eight youth workers and six social workers were employed in these two services. The Social Work Service had an open-door policy which resulted in an annual case load of approximately 600 families, most of whom came to the Brotherhood of St Laurence for financial assistance. The Youth and Children's Centre activities were open and the number of young people who attended is difficult to assess - one indicator is that attendance at adolescent club nights was in the region of 50-60, drawn from a pool of some 300 young people known to the services.

The following comments of a previous senior social worker aptly describe the type of families who used the social work and youth services provided by the Brotherhood of St Laurence, and the methods of work with the families utilised by the Social Work Service.

The families are mostly "economically, socially and personally disadvantaged to a severe, often chronic degree." Many of the "chronic aid seekers have built Brotherhood hand-outs into their patterns of coping with life." In the Social Work Service which was staffed by

professional social workers, the method of work was casework, using financial and material aid as a tool.' (Benn 1972, p1)

By the late 1960s, the impact of the U.S.A. "war on poverty", the Canadian Poverty Report and studies such as the Chemung County Evaluation of Casework Service to Multi-Problem Families, were having an impact on social policy ideas in Australia. This added to the frustration of workers and evidence from local studies such as The Have Nots a study of 150 low-income families (O'Neill 1972).

Goals of FCP

There was sufficient stimulus for the Brotherhood of St Laurence to rethink its approach to its work with multi-problem families and a decision was made late in 1971 to open a Family Centre with the following aims:

Over a period of three years to systematically determine ways in which the social functioning and self-esteem of "multi-deficit" and "multi-problem" families can be significantly enhanced. During this initial period, it should become clearer which particular approaches and programs are appropriate or inappropriate to achieve the following goals:

1. To help the families to view themselves, not as passive victims of society, but as active participants who are potentially capable of change. This includes both change in themselves and the capacity to change the environment in which they live. Thus, the Centre will aim to fully involve them in making the decisions about their families' futures.
2. To help the families to adjust to those aspects of the social structure which they cannot change, assisting them to effectively handle the social systems which most affect them.
3. To promote change in both public attitudes and existing social provisions which are often unsympathetic to poor people because they fail to conform to middle-class behavioural norms.' (Benn 1972, p3)

These aims were later modified to strengthen the "power" concept. The original aims stated that the project would "aim to fully involve" the families. By the time the Family Centre commenced operation in November 1972, the aims related more to giving the families control of the Centre.

This was operationalised by a four-pronged power concept outlined in the first, second, and fourth progress reports.

In brief, the Family Centre aimed to give the families power over decision-making, resources, relationships and information.

FCP becomes ARC

It did this individually with families, but also brought isolated people together in an organisation. They, therefore, had collective power, previously unknown and unavailable to them. During the Family Centre Project, the families were taught within limits to manage and use this collective power. A management committee was established in 1973, and by 1975 the membership was considering the organisation's future. The result of those deliberations was an Action and Resource Centre for Low-Income Families, a centre run by and for low-income people.

ARC

The philosophy of the Action and Resource Centre was basically the same as the philosophy of the Family Centre. That is, given the power, low-income, multi-deficit families will change their situation. ARC still aimed to provide resources to individual families as well as change society, but the emphasis and methods were different. More emphasis was placed on getting the families to act collectively. As the name implied, the main focus on ARC's efforts was on providing resources and undertaking collective action. Less emphasis was placed on activities and on developmental programs, but new opportunities were opened up by the employment of indigenous (family member) staff.

By 1976 the transferring of increasing responsibilities to these indigenous workers and to the Council and its standing committees was apparent. Many of the families had proved that, given the resources, they could change their disadvantaged situation. 1976 paved the way for the families to show that given the power, resources, skills, opportunities, motivation and support, they could control and run their own organisation with multiple benefits for a much larger number of low-income people.

Achievements of FCP/ARC

The fundamental achievement is ARC itself. The fact that such a Centre exists is important.

David Scott's opening comment in the First Annual Report states "The First Annual Meeting of ARC is an historic event for the Brotherhood and ARC and also for social welfare in Australia."

A group of very disadvantaged families now belong to the society in which they live. Some became active participants rather than passive victims and all had an organisation which was theirs; a place where they were something other than dependent welfare recipients.

Pauline Windler (1978), in a debate on whether ARC should continue after 1978, stated:

I have summed it up in three words, "The Powerless Poor". Going back a few years to the BSL, when most of us were welfare victims, the BSL knew what they were doing was no good. It was only creating us to be more dependent on the handouts of the Brotherhood. The Brotherhood knew there was something lacking and the something lacking was that the poor lacked power.

Dependent and divided, deprived families remain at the whim of benevolent decision-makers who, in many cases, do not acknowledge the existence of poverty and, even more frequently, blame the poor for their own circumstances.

ARC provided an organisational base which provided the means for deprived families to act collectively.

Having been established, the effectiveness of ARC as an organisation can be measured on several dimensions. Its ability to provide help to families in need, its ability to achieve changes which benefit low-income people, its ability to present new opportunities and support for personal development, and its ability to present new opportunities and support for personal development, and its ability to building a-sharing-caring communities as support networks for low-income families.

FCP in context

Was the FCP/ARC simply a good idea for the time? a child of the 70s? a piece in an ever-changing welfare market? the expression of the dominant welfare culture and of influential people of the time?

It was all of these, but to dismiss it as irrelevant to the 1980s would be selling it short.

Debates about the best ways to alleviate the effects of poverty and attempts to deal with its causes are perennial. Not only should the debates constantly be reworked, but each generation of welfare workers, planners, and administrators should face the challenge of achieving the most effective methods of intervention for the time - given the economic and political environment and the means at their disposal.

The 1960s and 70s was the period of Allinsky and Freire; Cloward and Ohlin's research into the "opportunity structure"; Sesame Street, Operation Headstart and the War on Poverty. It saw the rise of the civil rights movement, participation and a "claims" approach.

It was the tail end of a twenty-year period of economic growth and the start of the impact of the population bulge from post-war babies.

What was fashionable and what was perennial? What should we build on and what should be changed?

At the most fundamental level of considering those questions people here would agree that the relief of suffering, reducing inequality, and increasing the dignity of people are perennial.

If that trilogy is taken as a starting point then the FCP/ARC pursued it in quite interesting ways.

The relief of suffering was carried out in a social context; it was not provided in a purely clinical manner. Immediate needs were acknowledged and accepted as part of life. People were not separately categorised, treated as clients or forced to beg.

Efforts to reduce inequality were established within the Centre, but more widely, low-income people became powerful advocates for basic rights and improved welfare measures.

Increasing people's dignity underpinned all else. People were given responsibility, the opportunity to make decisions, skills and a base from which to operate. People had access to their files, a sense of the future and resources they could draw upon. Some had jobs and positions of status.

The influence did not stop there. The Centre was an energy source and provided ideological leadership for the welfare sector. My involvement in the national drug campaign has made me aware of qualitative differences between Victoria and some other States. It is in part because in Victoria the campaign has addressed underlying economic, social and lifestyle factors. It has avoided using guilt or blaming the victim.

Thus, there emerges from the FCP/ACP four important qualities:

- . relief of suffering;
- . equality;
- . dignity;
- . not blaming the victim.

A further influence of the principle underpinning the project spilled over into the self-help movement.

The project provided people with power and responsibility, with structures and processes through which they could work collectively and an organisation which provided a base for mustering resources.

It was alternative to low-income people being viewed as fodder for the welfare industry and it was part of the deinstitutionalisation process.

Principles worth keeping

Principles used in the approach to the FCP and ARC and worth keeping are:

- . relief of suffering;
- . striving for greater equality;
- . dignity above all else;
- . not blaming the victim;
- . provision of an organisational base.

The transfer of skills and empowerment of people through greater control over resources, information, relationships and decision making were principles relating to practice which spread widely throughout the welfare sector.

No doubt new and better ways will be found to improve the lives of disadvantaged people, but some principles enshrined in the FCP/ARC are worth keeping.

4. RUBY CANHAM

What is working in ARC today?

ARC is a registered co-operative, run according to the co-operative rules. Members pay \$1 to join plus 10 cents for a shareholding in ARC. The Centre has a board of seven Directors, four of whom are low-income people. The other three directors have had some involvement with ARC (such as voluntary work) and are sympathetic to ARC's aims.

Indigenous workers

The Centre's staff are a mixture of indigenous and professional workers and I think we have a good balance between them. In the early days there was tension between the two, but not today. Now there is a good working relationship between indigenous and professional staff. The indigenous staff have worked hard in the community to earn respect, not only from family members but from other community groups and government bodies.

In the past few years ARC has been invited to make submissions to the government on a variety of social issues of concern to low-income people, for example, domestic violence, social security, and children protection legislation. We have also been asked to assist other community groups with their submission writing. ARC's staff are respected by outside organisations because of the realisation that they have something valuable to offer. They have had different experiences to the professional trained staff and are often able to come up with the kind of creative solution to a problem that one would not get from a book! ARC's staff also serve on the committees of other community organisations. While I believe there will always be a need for professional staff, who have valuable skills to pass on, I have found that indigenous staff are more committed and will try harder to solve a person's problems.

The Co-ordinator at ARC is an indigenous worker and is responsible for the Legal Unit. The Legal Assistant is also an indigenous worker. Other indigenous staff are:

- . A full-time Development Officer who is responsible for activities among other things. The activities program is an important aspect of ARC as it gives people a chance to experience new things and to escape from their daily routine. The activities also have an educational component.

- . A full-time Children's Worker who runs our Children's Program, the aim of which is to provide a recreational outlet for children as well as learning experiences.
- . A full-time professionally trained Community Worker
- . A part-time professionally trained Youth Worker.

Programs in ARC

ARC receives funding from a variety of bodies, including the Brotherhood of St Laurence, the Legal Aid Commission, and the Leith Trust, and has to compete with other organisations for funding. Two new programs were started last year. One is the Social Action Program funded by Community Services Victoria. This program has resulted in the employment of two part-time indigenous workers and the aim is to involve members in social action on issues to them, for example in the areas of housing, social security and unemployment. The other program is an income and expenditure study designed to look at the amount of money low-income people live on and where the money goes. This research project employs one part-time professional Research Worker and one part-time indigenous Research Assistant.

We are lucky to have a full-time Development Officer to think up interesting new activities. People don't automatically want to learn to sew or cook just because they are on low-incomes! Programs that have been asked for by members or started by indigenous workers seem to have been the most successful, e.g. the Savings and Loan Scheme, the Legal area, day outings, community lunches and market trips. The Savings and Loan Scheme aims to introduce low-income families to a pattern of saving, to encourage groups saving, and to counteract society's pressure to continually spend.

The Legal Unit services clients from a low-income background who frequently have little knowledge or understanding of the legal system. ARC works with solicitors who we know to be sympathetic to low-income people. We also give support to clients before and after their cases go to Court. For example, if the client has a drug problem we will encourage them to go to a hospital to get help before their Court appearance. Last year we produced a video "Youth and the Law" and a follow-up one this year on legal jargon. The Legal Unit also gets involved in Care and Protection Orders and ARC's response is to try and find out what the problem is. We have found that problems in this area are often passed on from one generation to the next. Somehow this pattern has to be broken. Simply taking people to Court is not the answer.

Other activities, which are ongoing, include camps (adults, family, children and teenage), craft, tennis and indoor cricket. Last year we organised some relaxation classes which proved very

popular. Staff join in these activities too. We have found that members are keen to learn but also want to have a say in what they learn, which is only natural. Members have shown themselves to be willing to share skills with one another. This has been shown in the Savings and Loan Scheme and the Social Action Program. When members are actively involved in the initiation of new programs they are more likely to accept responsibility for the running of the program. For example, we have a camp committee made up of members. This committee took all the responsibility of deciding the guidelines for the camps. It took three weeks to get agreement but we now have guidelines that the members understand and respect. ARC also publishes a monthly news bulletin ARCHIVES written by members which provides news and information that members wish to share with others.

ARC provides support for members in crisis. It provides different options for them, enabling them to work out what is the best option to take. The support may involve going into schools with parents to negotiate with teachers, or to hospital or Court. We aim to work at the right level for each person so that they can understand what is going on.

ARC is trying to lessen dependence upon the Centre among children, young people and other members, by trying to get them to look at what is outside in the community as well as what is offered by ARC. The best thing I have seen happen is the kids staying on at school longer. This is very hopeful for the future.

Violence and theft

In the old ARC there were problems with violence and theft. One reason for the violence was that for many of the members this was the only way they knew to express their frustrations etc. As for the theft, the members were people who had very deprived lives, never owning anything of any value. I believe something should have been done sooner about tackling these problems rather than turning a blind eye to them. Now violence is not tolerated by the members and the honesty of the staff has had a favourable impact on the members.

Realistic expectations

I think a lot of people expected too much too soon from the old ARC. I also think that too much money was given to the Centre in those days. Now we have to scrimp and save more. It's good to see the old members still coming to ARC and supporting the newer members whereas in the past there was tension between old and new members. I think our present building is helpful because it has a large open area for activities and meetings. It is also close to public transport.

ARC, of course, is not an easy place to work in. For professionally trained workers, ARC has come as a bit of a shock. However, we can all learn from each other.

As for the future, ARC has to put more resources into training indigenous workers because if the two senior indigenous workers were to leave ARC would revert to professional control.

Lessons from the FCP

What we learnt at the old Family Centre is that the problems related to poverty cannot be overcome in one or two years and it is a pity the Centre did not go on for longer. However, it did have an impact. We have seen children go on to high school and stay there longer. We have also seen members gain their driver's licence and buy cars and most have been able to move away from the inner-city high-rise flats. I am sure we will see more changes with the younger generation who are aware of the value of education. If we have achieved anything it is to impress on parents that the only way to break out of the poverty cycle is through education.

5. MICHAEL LIFFMAN

The role of innovation: how did the FCP percolate through the sector and become so influential?

Why was the Family Centre Project influential? Well one of the obvious answers is a very clear one, and is that the Family Centre Project was a very high profile project; it was well-marketed, well-positioned, and well-promoted. It came from a very prominent agency. Where better to float a new pioneering idea than from the Brotherhood of St Laurence? It already had available to it, and enlisted further, key personnel. The people around the project, and those brought into it were already well-known, and they brought a lot of credibility and prominence into the activities and the ideas that they were associated with.

Level of resources

It was by our standards now, and even by the standards then, a remarkably well-resourced project. The staffing ratio was extraordinary. There must have been some 12 or 15 staff in the Family Centre Project, to its 60 families. The building, you will recall, was a large building, and very well set up. The funds available through the Income Supplement Scheme - I can't imagine that any project would have access to those sorts of funds now.

Promotion of FCP

The project was quite explicitly propagandised as part of its overall objectives and its methodology was quite strongly promoted. There were annual reports, we attended any conference that was going, there were constant requests to speak at meetings.

The whole unfolding of the sequence of events was cleverly orchestrated: it was known that it would be a three-year initial project and then it would consider moving into another three years. There were annual progress reports, and a review at the end of three years.

All these immediately established a visibility for the project, and it was cleverly and intelligently marketed. I don't know how conscious all those decisions were - I wasn't privy to all of them - but certainly there was real strategic intelligence underlying the way the project unfolded. There was also a great deal of confidence that that was the way to go. The Family Centre Project was set up as a high profile project and managed and provided accordingly.

Problem becomes opportunity

The second aspect of the Family Centre Project's promotion and influence was that, unusually, it was a project which took a problem and transformed that into an opportunity.

The problem was the existing case load, families not changing much, inter-generational patterns of dependency: all those issues we already know about. But then the problem was turned around and it was said "okay this is not a problem any more, this is an opportunity. This is an opportunity to innovate, to do new things, to get some new ideas around, to put the Brotherhood in the forefront yet again of social developments." So it was a very creative approach to dealing with a problem. The problem inherent in what the Brotherhood was trying to do was to reduce the case load from three hundred to sixty.

Work with other agencies

A secondary problem was what was going to happen to the families, and to the other agencies that get to carry the extra load. Again that was fairly creatively resolved by securing the respect and the collaboration and the interest of other agencies. Instead of other agencies feeling that the Brotherhood was creating extra burdens for them by dropping its case load, the whole welfare community was involved in this new exciting enterprise. There was a sense of real collaboration and respect and willingness to share the burden, to work with some of the possibly difficult consequences of the reduction of case load.

Whitlam Government

The third factor was that the Family Centre Project really rode into prominence on the crest of a wave. That wave of course was the change of government; Whitlam's election, a Labor government, and that abundant source of reformism which so characterised the time. Without the Whitlam government the funds would not have been available for the Income Supplement Scheme for instance, via Professor Henderson and the Poverty Inquiry. You will all recall that time and the sense that things were changing and it was now permissible to innovate and to take risks and to do new things and to introduce new ideas. The Family Centre Project's opening coincided almost to the day with the election of the Whitlam government. Of course the ideas were worked on well before then, as Peter has said, but again I would suggest that the ferment which led to the change in government was not unrelated to the factors that Peter has described as engendering the thinking which led to the Family Centre Project. All that experimentation became much more permissible and much more nurtured by the larger changes in the climate of that time.

(It is also interesting, I think, the Family Centre Project ended its first three years more or less in the time that the Whitlam government ended.)

The four powers

Possibly the final, and maybe the most important factor as to why the Family Centre Project was influential, was the set of ideas that it offered. They had several characteristics. One: they were in a sense simple. They might not really have been simple, as the discussion today and lots of earlier discussions have revealed, but they had a simple version. They were ideas that were able to be readily expressed and fairly readily understood.

They were the four powers: of information, decision making, relationships, and resources. There was the proposition that what families needed was not casework and the help from extended intervention from social workers, but resources - income and control over their own lives etc. The ideas at that level were fairly simply able to be expressed. They weren't too complex. They were different, they were in clear contrast to what had gone before. We were now not talking about extended casework but about resources, about freeing families up, about participation and so on. Clearly different from years and years of what had happened before where families were somehow second-class dependent citizens, and so on.

So the ideas were simple, and they were different. Moreover they were consistent with other feelings and other ideas and other directions that the community was heading in. Peter has described how they related to broader, international notions of participation, and equal opportunity, and so on. So the ideas were ones which resonated with lots of other things that were happening in the community.

Importance of rhetoric

Very importantly, and I have been reminded of it even by some of what's been said this morning, they were ideas which were able to be couched in what we might call fairly celebratory language. We were able to talk all the way through the project about certain fairly powerful, fairly uplifting, fairly optimistic things to do with participation and new opportunities and professional redevelopment and all sorts of things. There is another word for it - I guess - "rhetoric" - and I think there always has been an element of rhetoric in the project and the way it has been talked about. Again it was a good way of selling the ideas.

Research and the FCP

At the same time, while all of that was being done, what was being done was also being legitimised by the fact that there was research. The Family Centre was very generously serviced by research staff. During my time, there were two full-time research staff, and for some time after. Now for a project of sixty families that was very generous, so there was a sense we actually were looking at what we're doing, we were going to be accountable, we were going to tell the world about it, we were going to evaluate it. So it wasn't just pie in the sky it wasn't just shooting our mouths off: we were going to look long and hard and be accountable.

FCP in context

The real question, I guess, is what does all that have to do with the quality of the work that was being done and the ideas that were being tested and the outcomes that have been shown. I agree with Hayden, that the Family Centre has in all sorts of obvious and less obvious ways, continued to feed its way into other people's thinking and into the patterns and ideas of other agencies and other institutions. (At the same time I wouldn't want to neglect the fact the the Family Centre was not only the vehicle of certain ideas, but also the product. We should continue to be sensitive to the fact that all of us are determined and influenced by other forces and not only the creator of those forces. We shouldn't flatter ourselves too much that it was **the** project, that it was us that did certain things. We were also influenced by certain wider forces of which we were partly aware and partly unaware.)

Nevertheless the Family Centre did come to exemplify and capsule and express a whole lot of ideas which in various forms I think are still around us.

FCP and social change

As well as thinking about the matters which have already been raised this morning, there is also a very important question, or a series of questions, about social change and strategies for social change. Did the Family Centre and the dynamics that I have mentioned, prove to be an appropriate and useful method for change? Are there lessons to be learnt, are there ways in which we can reproduce or repeat some of the things that were done in those days? Well that is not really something I'm going to attempt to answer - it is what we are all discussing.

Sloganism and social change

But there is one issue there, which I do want to try and get to, which has to do with the benefits and the disadvantages of strategies of social change which involve the sort of fairly high profile playing around with ideas and innovation which the Family

Centre Project used. The Family Centre did involve a degree of simplification of ideas and a degree of sloganism. On the one hand that is a highly potent vehicle for change, because people and movements do proceed by a swing of a pendulum and by over simplifications. If instead we had seen the situation in a more complex way, if we had been more even handed about the costs and the benefits of what was being won and what was being lost, the whole project wouldn't have been as easy for the community to grasp and it wouldn't have fitted its way into debate and into other people's agenda in the way it did.

So it has clearly been a significant and a useful strategy for social change. Are there costs in it though, and are there ways some of those costs could have been avoided? I suspect there are, although I don't think they outweigh the good; but there are oversimplifications, which we tried to grapple with this morning and have on other occasions tried to grapple with. We need to be aware of what those oversimplifications were and to try and find the answers.

Achievements of FCP

Hayden I think made a very useful contribution when he talked about some of the real benefits, some of the real values that the experience of the Family Centre and of ARC have taught us. He talked about the fact that the professionals and clients could work together in less structured, less authoritarian, less clinical situations, and that people could be seen in a much more rounded way. There was a lot that was of enormous value in the Family Centre, but it is not described very accurately by some of what we talk about. It is not really described by de-professionalising, it's not altogether described by power over resources. Because when we look around, power over resources hasn't really changed all that much. It is obvious who's making decisions in this community and who is at the receiving end of those decisions. So some of those concepts don't describe the important lessons and experiments of the Family Centre Project as much as some of the more modest, less global sorts of comments which could be made. That is what Hayden was starting to talk about.

These are some of the things I recall and value from the Family Centre days. There is no question that professionals dealt in far more effective, far more honest, far more respecting ways with families in the Family Centre environment and the ARC environment than they did previously when they saw people by appointment behind closed doors, behind desks, and so on. There is no question that it was good for members of the project to have the opportunity to participate in management committees. There is no question that it was good that the Family Centre offered the social environment as well as a problem-solving one. They to me are the undoubted values and lessons of the project.

Participation in the FCP

I do question, however, whether it's been altogether useful and honest to offer the prospect of people becoming professionals when clearly that hasn't happened in the ways people might have understood the offer to mean. People haven't got command over resources in the way we might at some time have suggested to them. Not everyone wants to become a political activist. Not everyone wanted to become involved in the politics of the Family Centre or of ARC and to become office bearers or committee members or whatever. In a sense the expectation that what everyone wanted was that opportunity was possibly not the best expectation.

Losses and gains from FCP's high profile

What I want to suggest, and I'll close at this point, is that there are some risks as well as some gains in the strategy for social change, or in the strategy for becoming influential and well known, that the Family Centre and ARC took. In some of the hype, or the extravagant and optimistic wishes, and the over simplification of language and concepts, there were losses as well as gains. I don't know where you find the balance: whether you have to go for that strategy because that is the only way you get ideas around and ferment into the community or where there are other more low profile ways of securing change and new ideas which are possibly more intensitive to the complexity of any real on-the-ground situation. I suspect its the former, I suspect that you have to push the ideas and then deal with the occasional confused responses afterwards. I suspect that is the way to go but it is just worth, I think, bringing to consciousness that sort of dilemma. Thanks.

6. JAN KING

The consequences: a comparison between the intended and the unintended consequences

I would like to start by indicating that the brief that David Green and I were given, that is the intended and unintended consequences, is probably completely overwhelming.

ARC becomes a co-operative

At the time I came to ARC in early 1981, the organisation was in a state of decline. The membership was bewildered by the imminent closure of ARC and unsure about the future. Years of hopes and dreams were now out of reach.

I remember thinking, what am I supposed to do now? No one wants to talk about it, nobody really wants to move out of this building, and nobody has got any views about what should happen. It didn't seem to me to be appropriate for a project worker who had no real legitimacy in the organisation to be making suggestions, as that would have been in a sense in conflict with the very basis and foundations of the organisation.

Fortunately there were eight people, (four of whom were particularly interested) who I think saw it as their last commitment to the organisation - to see something actually happen. Two of those people are in the room now, and without those four people I think that the organisation that we have today just would never have been realised.

There were a series of negotiating meetings between what was known at that time as the negotiating committee and the associated directors of ARC, which just happened to be David Green, Connie Benn and Peter Hollingworth. Now they were sort of three fairly formidable people to start negotiating with. However the members had learnt a great deal about negotiating throughout both the Family Centre and ARC and were able to carry that off fairly successfully. It was finally resolved that the most appropriate framework within the organisation was a co-operative, because the co-operative society best reflected the principles on which the two earlier phases of the organisation had been built on.

Cuts in ARC's budget

Not only did we have a membership that was cynical and not really all that interested, we were also bereft of resources. Just as a comparison there were twenty staff for sixty families in the first year of the Family Centre, and the final year budget was approximating \$310 000. We were given initially a budget of \$40 000. Now we were able to negotiate upwards to \$64 000. We had to find premises and we clearly had to employ some staff. That just further alienated the members because they were used to controlling resources. For example, they were used to having transport and saying, "look I need lift to Broadmeadows" and just picking up the phone. There were a whole range of activities that clearly had to be cut.

At the time I felt that the Brotherhood had made some real mistakes in terms of reducing the budget to that size and I also felt that they hadn't given sufficient thought to how the transfer should occur. However in retrospect I think that the reduction in the budget provided the opportunity, out of necessity, to review what was good and what was bad about the organisation and what were the most important things for the membership. It isn't surprising that with that sort of limited budget the sorts of things that came from the members were that we still want to have activities, that we want to maintain camping programs and make a small allocation to the youth program.

Indigenous workers lose jobs

Discussions about the use of those resources led to fairly open and honest discussion amongst the members about benefits they felt they had achieved from the organisation. It invariably raised this question yet again of indigenous workers and the opportunity for jobs. There were large number of people who were actually losing their jobs through this transfer process. People felt that they had basically been used and I think that was the most often used description of that. They had participated in this process and had put all sorts of energy into it because they believed they were going to get a job. They believed that even if they hadn't had a job up until now they were certainly going to get one in the future if they stayed around for long enough. We were able to still employ Ruby in the legal position but that's clearly as far as the budget stretched. Having resolved that activities would be the focus of the organisation people were still quite unhappy about that.

Violence and power over relationships

That lead us on to the next issue that was the issue of violence which is directly related to the power of relationships. It would seem to me, over a fairly long period of observation, that the issue of power over relationships was only dealt with in one phase; that was the relationship between members and professional staff which was also externalised to other organisations. People had clearly learnt to work with professional staff. There is no doubt that the honesty of relationships between professional staff and the members of ARC is not replicated anywhere else that I've seen since I left. People felt quite comfortable in putting their positions and expecting that that position would be heard and that something would come about as a result of that.

However what was never dealt with effectively was the relationship between the members. The way in which people related to one another seemed to me to be a replication of the way in which they dealt with relationships within their own families. There was evidence of high levels of violence between men and women. Women constantly talked to me about how they didn't have a real voice because if they did the men would quickly trample on that.

There were issues in relation to parents and children and the way that had not been dealt with and I am sorry to say that it never had been dealt with in an upfront way.

In the old ARC they had a very large building, huge in fact, and so people could be shifted out of one room into another. They could be given a different task or they could be moved into the food co-op for example. After the move we had a very small building all this happened in the front room. We were trying to write reports and clean up after children and of course we didn't have a cleaner and we had to deal with it. Now I am not sure that I wouldn't have dealt with it the same way that people did in the old centre anyway but we just didn't have that opportunity. The way in which that was dealt with was along fairly simple lines and I think it had an element of negotiation that I'm not sure was evident previously in the organisation. The Board, the staff and the membership resolved on a number of principles about behaviour and they stood alongside the principles of the co-operative. That is, that all members had a right to have a say in the organisation and that nobody should have any more power than anybody else. Of course the informal hierarchy and power base still operated but there were clear rules that everybody agreed to in relation to behaviour in the centre. We resolved on periods of banning people, about how that should happen and about the way in which there was to be no physical threat amongst the members.

From those very early beginnings the transfer of skills or participation in that level of negotiation amongst themselves took account of the rights of workers and I do want to make the point clear that working in ARC is not an easy task. It is extremely demanding and one in which there is no barrier to the coal face. Everything happens before you, you can't lock your door because people want to kick it in. It is extremely demanding and if we were going to survive given that there were only a couple of us there were some limits to what we could reasonably expect to contend with. Those processes proved to be extremely successful in further areas of work with the organisation. For example, when we made submissions for the report on domestic violence we were able to use those early debates about what was reasonable for men to do to women, or teenagers to do their parents.

It was very interesting, the sorts of responses that came from men, when we were talking about that and for those of you who are familiar with that legislation there are some fairly strong penalties contained within that report about restraint and the power of the court to intervene. Although our experiences were fairly simple in their applications they proved to be fairly successful in moving on from where we were at. We were really in the doldrums. So that was one significant issue that I think was dealt with but it was dealt with because there wasn't any other way to deal with it. We simply didn't have any money we could divert to that issue. There were only two of us on the staff at the time and I think that that was a real achievement in terms of that transfer into the next stage.

Reliance on BSL

One of the other lessons I think that was significant from that transfer was the informal pressure that was still brought to bear from the Brotherhood. Even though ARC had independence it certainly wasn't executive independence and there was a heavy reliance on the part of a lot of members to revert to the hierarchy in the Brotherhood. Now that was perfectly understandable when we were located in the backyard of the Brotherhood. People who had known Peter when he was still at St Marks church and the relationships were very strong. Connie was still around in the research unit. It was fairly understandable that when the going got really rough that the people would revert to moving back to the Brotherhood to say, well look how are we going to deal with this.

One of the interesting areas where that happened was in the finance area. There were negotiations going on quite often in the Finance division who turned out to be a very interesting little power broker. By physically removing the organisation from the Brotherhood that served to break down some of that old reliance

on the BSL. To be fair to those who were at the Brotherhood at the time, I think that they tried to resist that but there was still subtle pressures on them. These were pressures in terms of their funding bodies and the relationships that they had had between the members over a period of time.

Professional and indigenous workers' mixture

The mix of staff is and remains a significant issue within the organisation. There has been a fair degree of comment today about the notion of the indigenous worker. Somebody made the comment earlier that indigenous workers want to become professionals anyway, so why draw the distinction? We draw the distinction because the maintenance of an organisation like ARC is dependent on that mix of staff. There is no way, as Ruby says at this point in time, the organisation can manage on its own with indigenous workers. Certainly throughout my time there, there was no way the organisation could work without the use of professional staff. The indigenous staff that I had were fairly exceptional and they are at a level at which I would describe as professional now. Although they have moved away from those early notions that were indigenous, they still retain a level of understanding of the sorts of difficulties that poor people have to contend with, which the rest of us can too easily lose sight of. Certainly in my time they would come to me and say, Jan, why did you make that decision, or we think you made a mistake. They would raise components of whatever we were talking about, and they were things that I had just never ever thought of. They were the reminders of the membership because clearly you can't take on board everything that all the members say. They were there and were taking seriously their role in an organisation for low income people.

We deal with things very differently here, and I constantly appreciated the sort of support that they gave me but I was even more impressed with the way in which they took that brokerage role and never lost sight of it. So I think there needs to be a degree of clarity about what we mean by indigenous workers, because it is not a sustainable position over a long period of time. However the need to have them within the organisation is integral to the future of the organisation. Now in order to have those people there it requires resources. We did not have the resources to allocate to training new indigenous staff.

Importance of support workers

What we also didn't have were support workers. I have no doubt about the importance that those support workers played in terms of supporting those indigenous workers, encouraging them, being their friend, being there to take that morning after, and say "look I've had a bogey night last night" and just being there for them. The rest of us had a dual function; we were there to

support the members but we also have a role to play in terms of the external focus of the organisation about trying to influence policy. There were constant conflicts about our time allocation and what we could and couldn't achieve. I've never had the opportunity of actually having a support worker within the organisation, but I know very clearly their importance both from the experiences that showed themselves throughout the period of time that I was there, and from the constant comments of members about the importance of those support workers in the organisation. I have not read a great deal about their role, and it's one that should be given greater consideration. I think it is significant that the support workers are those people who still have the involvement with the membership. It was significant that two of the support workers were elected onto the first Board of the co-operative and it was an indication of the way in which the members viewed them and the level of trust that they had in them.

Future of ARC

ARC will face a critical time in the near future as without doubt either Ruby or Nancy or both of them will leave in the future. They do require those resources to maintain that balance between the professional staff and the indigenous staff.

ARC and other consumer based organisations

The other area which I think the new organisation should comment on is the degree to which ARC can transfer its knowledge and its skills to other consumer based organisations. It is certainly my experience that VCROSS, the Brotherhood, and all sorts of organisations, felt the need to consult with ARC about a whole range of policy initiatives. I think we became very effective at that. It happened in the early days and as Michael said the project was marketed very well. During my time we never ever developed a capacity to share those skills with other organisations very effectively. We could tap in and demand as of right to comment on a whole range of matters that influenced organisations, but we never were able to effectively share those sorts of skills with other organisations. Now, I think, that the new organisation has managed to achieve that much more effectively than we have and it might be interesting to ask them to comment on it.

Value of ARC

In conclusion I want to say, and to reinforce Hayden's decision, that the very existence of this organisation is what's important. There are good things about it and there were bad things about it. There were some very destructive things that happened through the course of time and we are only able to learn about that because it was a broad aim project and it was treading new

ground. Nobody could be expected to predict all the sorts of difficulties that we were going to confront. It is also important to remember that organisations like ARC are not a panacea for poor people. They don't inherently increase their income levels and they still require a degree of support that organisations like ARC often cannot provide. They still need to tap into to other sorts of specialist organisations and the challenge is to influence the way in which those organisations can continue to provide that kind of support.

8. DAVID GREEN

The consequences: a comparison between the intended and unintended consequences

As Jan King said we agreed to work on different levels about this question of unintended consequences. I would like to raise some issues that connect in part to what Jan has said and to take them back to some of the original theory about the Family Centre, and some of the basic ideas upon which the Family Centre was constructed, and the basic ideas that have prevailed since. I did hear Michael Liffman being apologetic about asserting some personal opinion or even been a bit direct about something and I cringed because I have been somewhat direct in these comments. So if the flavour of the morning has been caution, care, and concern, it is going to change a bit.

Violence and relationships

I will try and pick up four issues. I would like to start with the question of violence and relationships. The issues and problems around control and organisational sanctions have not featured very much in the reports and research writings regarding the Family Centre and ARC. The absence of this, and the oblique references to these issues, is surprising, given the centrality of power to the developmental model.

Now there are a couple of explanations that come to mind to explain this curious gap in the analysis of the projects. Firstly, I think that while power and control were central to the theory about the Family Centre, what happened in the projects was that substantial organisational control and power was vested in the co-ordinators and this has always been understated. It is not surprising that the co-ordinators were the principal writers for ARC, the Family Centre and other reports, and were understandably reluctant to spell out or make explicit their own role. Unfortunately I think this trend in the writings about the project, perhaps some collusion with research as well, has served to obscure one of the most important aspects of the project: that is, the explicit and more significantly the implicit control roles of the co-ordinators. The co-ordinators' roles here were extremely significant to the operation of the Family Centre and ARC.

The second reason or explanation for why organisational control and sanction issues didn't feature highly is that the developmental model deals very comfortably with issues of power, when the questions relate to the transfer of power from those who have it to those who do not. The notion of power that was

implicit all through the project and the writings about the project in a crude sense seemed to me to be full buckets and empty buckets, and it was a matter of taking out of one bucket and putting in another bucket. In a sense all was legitimate in that process. However, the model is not so clear on issues of the transfer of power between peers, between colleagues, between friends or non-friends, when these peers or friends are relatively powerful or powerless in the context of the project.

I think this issue is critical to the successful or the unsuccessful operation of the projects. It is also critical to all projects that are modelled on attempts to change hierarchical structured relationships which determine the power and control relationships between the players. There is a significant gap in the Family Centre and the ARC material with respect to these questions and there is a significant gap in the field as a whole.

Before I go any further with this point I think it is probably fair at this stage to say that probably one out of three community organisations that are based upon models that use the theories and ideologies associated with participation, equality, the reduction of hierarchy, control, and power are in trouble at any one point of time internally with power relationships between the participants. To suggest that this particular problem was distinctive to the Family Centre or ARC is a nonsense. We all know it.

The other thing that is shared in common is that the writings of the Family Centre and ARC never really made explicit the problems of violence and internal control and power relationships, as distinct from external power relationships, nor has any writing about all those other respected and protected organisations that are going through similar traumas.

It is one of the most amazing things that seventeen or twenty years, or what other time perspective you have, after the development of collective models, co-operative models, community models, participating models of organisations, for undertaking various things, that the amount of literature on the eternal internal and internal strife, tension, damage, harm, trauma, that goes on within those organisations is non-existent apart from some writings that have come out of the women's movement, and out of some of its collectives, and in a very rare number of instances sometimes out of the conservation movement.

I want to say that some of you may greet this point with some scepticism, but I could guarantee that I could take you right now to three organisations built and affected by the theories of the Family Centre within which there are enormous problems of control and struggles about control which are having a tremendous impact on those organisations. It seems extraordinary to me that seventeen years on and in the same street as the Brotherhood,

there will be a group of people who will be sitting around a table, drinking coffee, being extremely destructive towards each other and certainly destructive to any strangers that are coming in through the door, and are radically affecting and altering the very essential objectives of the organisation.

That particular organisation is not part of the Brotherhood and doesn't have any direct connection within the Brotherhood whatsoever. It is only last week that the staff, two staff, who were absolutely committed, as committed as any of the Family Centre staff were, to the notions of participation, left that organisation in total despair and demoralised almost beyond comprehension. That's seventeen years on.

We seem as far as ever removed from being able to come to grips with it theoretically, let alone in terms of results. So I think inherent, unintended consequences have arisen from the notion of power within the developmental model which was implicit in the Brotherhood project and now in many others. Whether it is the notion that there is a fifth power, or a rethinking of the notion of power over relationships, which starts to address the questions of power over each other, and power over each other which is predicated on trust and equality. I don't know. But I am absolutely convinced that it has to be addressed.

Participation and power over decision making

The second area of unintended consequences is related to the dominant theme and role that participation played in the Family Centre and other projects. I think it is probably fair to say, and Connie's last writings on the Family centre confirms this, that the dominant strategy was seen to be participation, and the dominant goal or end result which appeared to receive most attention, is power over decision making. The dominant arena in the processes of participation and the dominant arena for achieving the goal was the project organisation.

At the conclusion of her book Connie recast her theories about a developmental approach to emphasise the importance of participation again as a key strategy. She re-cast the power of resources, relationships, information, and decision making as goals or end results in order to redefine the arena and the targets of change as the organisation, rather than the socio-economic conditions of the membership. Connie draws it back very much more into the arena of the organisation.

Now why does the strategy of participation, and the goal of power over decision making, become the primary interest of the project? Why do they hold central place in most of the progress reports and the research reports regarding the project? What kind of processes have led to a concentration or focus on power over

decision making and the related strategy of participation? Some explanations, some answers to these questions are I think straightforward.

Firstly, power over decision making is the only power that is truly controlled within the project and of itself. Each of the projects contributed towards increasing power over resources, power over information, and power over relationships. But ultimately they could not deliver in any absolute way over these matters. Given the focus on the organisation, whether it was the Family Centre, SPAN or ARC or whatever, as the arena of change, and given the greater opportunity to exercise power over decision making, it is not surprising that it becomes a dominant goal through most of the project.

Secondly, it could be that power over decision making is a more tangible power which is more easily expressed in terms of structures, which can be recorded in terms of processes, which can be proven to be different from prior experiences. In other words it lends itself to be described and analysed and progress can be tracked.

Compared to difficulties possessing power over information, which can only be relative, or power over relationships which may also be intangible, power over resources which may be marginal, power over decision making is of substance and could be expressed in structural terms.

Thirdly it is possibly the case that decision making, and the critical role of participation in achieving power over decision making, was a reflection of the professionals' and staff perspective on their own world and the directions that they wished to take within their own world. Participation in decision making had been a significant aspect of disputed debate in welfare organisations and community organisations in the early 60s, and equally so were important issues to professionals within the Brotherhood.

So participation and decision making were on the professionals' agenda and very close to the top. Partly because resources, relationships, and information were already acceptable to them, the professionals by and large had power over relationships, by and large had power over resources, by and large had power and access over information. Professionals' power over decision making was a gap in their repertoire of power. It is not surprising that they, and we, put a great deal of stress on power over decision making and therefore on participation. It is not surprising that participation and power over decision making became dominant in most of the Brotherhood projects.

The co-ordinator of the Family Centre Project quotes Frances Fox Piven to support her focus on participation and decision making for her last book on the project. Piven suggests that the most significant structural change in society are achieved through organisational forms. The question is: is that true? Would we still be arguing that in response to questions that the Brotherhood is raising today?

Participation influences do not only consist of the relations between disparate individuals and official decision makers says Frances Pivon. The influence of individuals is mediated by organisations. It is through organisations that diverse individual resources are co-ordinated into coherent patterns of effective influence. All the Brotherhood projects have used the strategies of participation of disadvantaged people in decision making structures. Participation has been in the form of special interest lobbying constituency groups and, in some projects, participation through working as staff in the projects themselves, with indigenous workers notions.

All of these are the kind of approaches which had been recommended by overseas writers and which were inherent in the thinking in the 60s and 70s. The American war on poverty, the New Careers program in the States, and many others that emerged out of developments in America in the 1970s, the development of the consumer movement in most countries of the Western world, the reactivation of local issues and local politics, all support this perspective.

The Brotherhood took due regard that enhancing poor people's options was inherently related to enhancing their participation.

The retrospective questions are: did participation assume a too dominant a role in the project? Does active participation achieve power over decision making in micro-communities, and albeit some fairly marginalised projects in organisations, and constitute any significant change in the state and opportunities of poor people? Is it possible that involvement and participation in welfare projects may in fact be a diversion of poor people from participation in mainstream organisations, mainstream political activities, and mainstream allocation of resources?

All of you will have strong views as to the answer to these questions and every reader of the Brotherhood material will be aware that for many participants in the Brotherhood projects, and equally participants in similar projects, that opportunities for participating of poor people would be very limited if these kind of opportunities within community organisations weren't available. However the questions remain and still have to be answered, and have to be answered in a late 80s context.

Editing note: A small section of David's talk is missing due to damage to the audio tape. David also had to cut short his paper because of a shortage of time. Consideration is being given into developing David's talk into a policy paper. If interested, check with the Social Policy and Research Department (BSL).

8. CONNIE BENN

The benefits of hindsight: what could we have done differently?

Criticisms of the FCP

I thought I might start with looking at the major things about which the Family Centre has been criticised and then cover a few of the things that I think were most important about it.

I think one of the major things about the Family Centre was the criticism that it was too costly for replication:

- that it cost a lot of money;
- how could it ever be done again;
- was the BSL sure it got enough out of it for the dollars.

Another criticism was that it affected too few families. Indeed it didn't affect a whole lot in the primary sense, but in the secondary sense I think it affected a lot of people.

Another criticism from professional social workers was that the Family Centre blurred the distinctions between different types of professional workers and that was not a good thing. The final criticism was that the Family Centre stopped the BSL from actually working with poor families, (and I can still hear Jean on the switchboard saying, "the Brotherhood doesn't work with the poor any more, they've started this thing called the Family Centre".)

Achievements of the FCP

I believe the Family Centre meant much more to the field of social welfare than just moving a few families out of poverty, and I think Michael Liffman probably said that earlier. I believe it produced an approach which led to a whole group of innovations, which I think have been immensely important in the welfare field, such programs like SPAN, the Neighbourhood Employment Project, and various projects for young people. I think that The Family Centre Project demonstrated a different way of working with poor families. It was terribly important at the time and badly needed, because we professional social workers were still doing things to people and very little with people. I think we turned around some of those attitudes of professional social workers and helped to empower poor people.

The Family Centre was a precursor of the whole consumer/self-help/neighbourhood house/movement. I think it produced a lot of innovative concepts. As an aside, I would like to tell you that only last week a young person from a school of social work gave me a lecture on the importance of "open files", and how I really ought to do something about it. These sorts of things which we now accept and take for granted such as open files, and developmental plans, came out of the Family Centre or were conceptualised there. Actually it was in the Citizens Welfare Service that I developed the idea of open files and developmental plans mainly because I had found that people didn't like you having bits of paper written about them tucked away in filing cabinets; that they wanted to see what was written about them, and wanted to be involved in that writing. So there were lots of innovative concepts which I believe have now spread widely all over the welfare field and we've forgotten that many of them started in the Family Centre.

There was a lot of idealism, altruism, call it what you may, in the 1970s that needed testing, that needed to be looked at, that needed to be rejected, and I think we did a lot of that testing in the Family Centre. We kept some things and we rejected others.

I believe that the Family Centre suggested models of future work with poor families, of which the ARC model is only one, and I'd like to emphasis that. The Brotherhood took a particular direction when it established ARC arising out of the Family Centre. That wasn't the only direction that it could have taken.

There is one program at the moment that I think uses a lot of the developmental concepts of the Family Centre but in a completely different model, I refer to the Broadmeadows Family Service. So with these criticisms in the background I asked myself what would I have done differently in the Family Centre. I think that I know of only two programs that still have the smell of the Family Centre about them: the Affirmative Employment Program and some of the concepts that are used in Limurru.

Poverty in the 80s

I think now is the time for greater innovation. We are all being asked to do new things with less money. That's the time when I think it pulls the best out of people. We've got to forget the fact that we once had money to do things that we wanted to do, and we've got to use what money we've got to deal with what are very enormous problems at the moment. I refer of course to high unemployment, the costs to families at the moment. We haven't lost all poverty in this community. We've got to look for cost effective measures which will assist people to deal with their own difficulties.

We've got to ask ourselves what is offered to the poor now. There are some new social security measures which are currently being packaged. I don't think it is enough. I don't think it tackles things like long-term unemployment, it certainly doesn't tackle the way some people become more and more disadvantaged with each decade. I think we are forgetting the dramatic demographic changes which are taking place. There is an opportunity now that people are getting older, to link old people with young people, particularly in poor families. Those traditional family linkages are often broken by unstable housing and other things that affect poor families.

I am worried about what is loosely called managerialism in the welfare field and its effect on the development of welfare services. It is hard to get people in the public sector to share that concern. There seems to be a failure to understand that social welfare has always been on the cheap, and never has had enough money. How can you be cost effective when you have always been under-funded?

I think there are opportunities for demonstration projects in the disability and children in poverty areas, and the Brotherhood might be one of the few organisations that can mount them. Those of you who have read the Social Justice Strategy will know that there is a whole series of partnership projects suggested there. I believe the Brotherhood should really attempt to move into some sort of partnership with government and try and deal with those target groups that the government identified in its Social Justice Strategy. So they are the sort of general things I'd do if I had the opportunity again.

What could have been done differently [in FCP]?

Specifically, what would I do differently within the project, if I was doing it tomorrow? Well the first thing I'd do, (and this is heart-felt experience coming out of the machinery of government changes), would be to start with completely new staff. The Family Centre staff were composed of the Brotherhood Youth Work Service staff and the social work service staff who brought with them completely different cultures. Trying to meld the two together took a lot of energy and time that should have gone to the families rather than into keeping staff happy, which was what we were doing a lot of the time in the early days.

Now we are experiencing the same problems of culture amalgamation in attempting to put together some of the human services in the Department of Community Services in Victoria. I think you can do without these sorts of problems. In a new project like the FCP it is probably a good idea to start with new and committed staff.

Maybe the second thing that I would do differently would be to allow the families to select themselves for the project. When I was looking through the material I had on the Family Centre last night, I couldn't get over the arrogance we showed in believing we should select families who would join the project. We set up selection criteria and we selected families ourselves. We didn't make any attempt at all to ask families to select themselves or to establish their own criteria or to do any of the things that I would do now. So I would work out some mechanism whereby families themselves could decide whether they wanted to be members of the Family Centre Project or not.

I believe that the original three years we had for the project was not quite long enough. If I were doing it again I would take a little longer over that first phase, perhaps another couple of years. What we were being asked to do was to try and reverse what was often decades of deprivation in three years. This was particularly so for the skill transference that was required to empower, and I think that if we had a little longer we would have strengthened the empowerment concept.

Three resource areas

I would have liked to have spent more time and effort on three particular resource areas. One was on housing. I would have spent a lot more time on stabilising people's **housing**. I believe stable housing is a very important thing for people because it brings with it relationships and networks for children, for families. I know that we tried hard to stabilise housing but I think that we could have tried harder.

Secondly, I would have liked to have spend more time on **income security** measures that were lasting. The guaranteed income was good but it did not last long enough to produce many lasting effects. So I would spend more time on income security and housing. I would spend more time on the **children**. We did concentrate on the children a lot, but I would have spent more time on looking at ways in which we could develop their potential and assist them to break out of what was, for many for them, a cycle of poverty.

FCP and other BSL services

The final thing that I would have done within the project was to create links between the Family Centre Project and other BSL services. When Sumner House was first thought of it seemed to me that one of the best parts about it was there were old people who could look at young people, kids playing on the grass; that old people might "do a bit of the granny stuff". I thought that would be good because I knew many families in the Family Centre came from very disrupted families and didn't have the parents that really helped in bridging the gap between the aged and the young

and help in the continuity of the culture. We didn't utilise the connections between services enough, and later on I will explain why I think we didn't. There was no connection so that we lost a chance of osmosis, of allowing some of the concepts to flow from the Family Centre into other services.

De-professionalisation and anti-professionalism

There are two other areas where I think that is important to look at what we would have done differently. I would have liked to have highlighted more for professional social work the difference between de-professionalisation and anti-professionalism. In this context I would like to draw your attention to an article by Wendy Weeks, that has been accepted for the next Social Work Journal. Wendy makes it quite clear in this article that de-professionalisation is a means of looking at social work again; of looking at new methods and techniques and methods of working.

De-professionalisation was an attempt to take the elitism out of professionalism. It was an attempt to make social workers and other professionals accountable to consumers, and not only to the profession. De-professionalisation was all about that. It wasn't saying social workers are "no good" and they have no skills, it never said that. It said social workers have got skills and their obligation is to transfer those skills to other people who haven't got those skills. In return, with any luck, they will get skills that they haven't got from the consumer, in this case the families. And that is what de-professionalisation was all about.

Now I know that the Family Centre Project, and I, in particular, got the reputation of anti-professionalism. It was never intended and I think Wendy corrects that misapprehension. It is a good article, and you should try and look at it if you are interested in professional social work. I do regret that we didn't take the opportunity to say we have learnt new things, and new ways of doing things. Professional social work does need to take a look at itself. We didn't move into areas where we might influence social work curricula as we should have. We didn't try to change social work courses. Some of us may be trying to do some of that now, but we didn't try to do it arising out of the Family Centre Project, although we had in front of us a demonstration of the way in which different methods of social work could actually assist people and the profession. The only school that I know of that has tried to develop the developmental approach, to use it theoretically and to develop it, is the PIT school and I suppose there are obvious reasons for that.

Impact of FCP on the BSL

The final area that I wanted to talk about was the effect of the Family Centre Project on BSL and what in fact we could have done differently that might have some, or greater effect, on the Brotherhood as an organisation. One of the things we had to do in the Family Centre Project (to stay alive I suppose), was to create a very cohesive staff group and that very cohesiveness actually took people away from the central organisation (BSL). And I will read a bit out of my thesis because it puts it well. I'm talking about the cohesiveness of the staff and what the impact of it was on the Brotherhood. And I say "The symptoms of the latter consequence", that is the cohesiveness of the staff, "were that attendance at Brotherhood meetings and functions dropped off dramatically; workers were reluctant to walk the 100 yards to the Brotherhood Head Office and acted as if the distance was 100 miles."

Other Brotherhood staff were commonly referred to as "that lot over there". Now on reflection I think that we should have done something about that if we were really interested in affecting the whole of the organisation. As it was, I think we did very little in the Family Centre Project to alter the power relationships within the organisation of the Brotherhood as a whole, very little indeed. I think there was an attempt by ARC and Hayden Raysmith to try and alter these power relationships by producing conflictual situations after the Family Centre Project, I remember at one Executive meeting we were stormed by a delegation of ARC people, some of the Family Centre people might remember that day. I am convinced that wasn't the way to do it. I think we missed a real opportunity to alter those power relationships and we didn't take it.

I think also that there has been a reaction to the Family Centre Project and to the developmental approach in the Brotherhood. It looks to me from the outside as if the Brotherhood has slipped back into more traditional, safe, "no risk" ways of dealing with types of service delivery. I don't see too many attempts apart from the Affirmative Employment Program to empower people, which was what I think the Family Centre Project was all about. I think one of the effects on the Brotherhood, as an organisation, was to remove the Brotherhood from service delivery to young people and I don't think funding other organisations is a good enough substitute, but a bit of a cop-out actually. I think that the Brotherhood could look again at services to young people.

It seems to me that the other effect on the organisation was that the Brotherhood became a bit tired of innovation. We did have one, two, three, four innovations one after another, and it seemed as if the mood was "lets have a rest and consolidate". But

I am sad about that because there are many opportunities to continue to test out the developmental approach. I think ARC was only one way of testing out the approach for families.

Broadmeadows Family Services

I would like to just quote a few headings out of another program which I believe uses the approach. The annual report of the Broadmeadows Family Services just landed on my desk. It uses a lot of the developmental concepts and here are some of the headings out of the report:

Increased participation by service users;

Development of mutual aid and support groups based on a model of co-operative effort between workers and service users;

Education and skills sharing approaches, a greater emphasis on practical and material needs;

A greater involvement in community action.

These are the threads of this service which produce a different program model.

So that it seems to me there are other ways of picking up the concepts of the Family Centre and using them in the service of families. The only other thing that I want to say is we missed an opportunity also to encourage the Brotherhood to move out of traditional Fitzroy in terms of services to families, and I was just sitting and thinking last night, I wonder if Father Tucker were alive in 1987 whether he would set up services in Fitzroy.

9. **PANEL:** Don Edgar, Jean McCaughey, Len Tierney.

Introduction to Panel Discussion

Jan Carter: I guess that theme of what the Brotherhood should and shouldn't be doing will continue for the rest of the afternoon. I wonder if perhaps Don, Jean, and Len could join me at this point. Because we thought it would be good to have some reflections from the three people who haven't been intimately involved in the Brotherhood services but who were very interested, particularly in the Family Centre Project, and some of the repercussions of that through family services in general and ARC in particular.

We thought that we'd ask each of them to reflect on some of the things that have been said, and some of their own views about the direction of family services.

DON EDGAR

Don Edgar: It's been very interesting to listen to the discussion today because I've followed this project for many years since Connie's thesis came across my desk at LaTrobe. Although I've not been involved directly in welfare service provision, the Institute obviously has a very deep interest in the way in which family services are provided. We do try and keep up with what's happening though we haven't done any direct research on it.

Listening to those last discussions, I'm struck again with how narrow your perspective is. It's a "welfare" perspective. There's no mention of the school, no mention of the labour market, there's no mention of the employers and their responsibilities for families and so on. My standpoint, from a broader family policy perspective, is what the Institute has been on about at Federal and at State level for some years. We've been saying you won't support families only through welfare services. Families need support at every level throughout the society. In fact, the comment that was made a minute ago struck a chord with me because nobody has really, to me, defined what these "family services" are all about. To my mind, the point is that only half of it is to remove poverty, but even so, why are you trying to remove poverty? Well you're trying to remove poverty so that people lead a decent life with some dignity, that they have a share, some access to human resources. And if you can get that end in sight, the goal is to improve the quality of family living, the standards of living, of well-being, whatever you want to call it.

I think the Brotherhood has got to focus in on a particular task. You're also talking about excluded families, disadvantaged families, and so on. What is the problem? Is it a problem of family breakdown, is it a dysfunction of those families? It is in some sense an abuse of power within those families, the domestic violence, the misuse of alcohol, drugs, and so on. If that's the case your services or your provisions ought to focus on helping those families get their act together a bit better. And it won't be only through counselling. I haven't heard any mention at all of the possibility of the Brotherhood or other agencies, for example, developing courses or programs or workshops or group seminars for families on how to alter a violent situation within a family, or how to restructure power, or how to get the schools being more responsive to the needs of children.

The comment about focusing on the children may well be a good way to go. The Quebec Government, for example, in Canada, has just developed a framework for family services, family policy generally, which says the main task is to assist families in the job of bringing up children. Now that's only one task for family policy, but it's a reasonable sort of framework. Even though a lot of people aren't having children any more, there's a task of caring, doing something for the individuals in every family structure. The Quebec report takes a three pronged attack. First the family is one end of that child rearing process. Parents basically are the educators, the rearers of children. Secondly, the schools are there supposedly helping parents bring up those children so they can cope, so they have some sense of power, so they get some access to the resources of the society. And the work system, the work structure is the third prong of their attack. It's family, education, work. They've developed a whole framework for family services and family policy which says you've got to get all three working together.

It seems to me a pity if the Brotherhood diversified or went back to simply providing services. I would have thought that there's all sorts of room for innovative projects located in one area. I don't see any reason why you should move out of Fitzroy or the inner city. It doesn't matter where you are, you can pull yourselves up and move out to Broadmeadows and do the same sort of thing. But what you could be doing is demonstrating the efficacy of a focused and integrated approach to supporting families in their tasks. If you're on about family support and family functioning and family structures, coping, having some access to resources, sharing power and so on, then you've got to answer the question what do you want to do about it?

Now I've listened to the description of the ARC project and the Family Centre and to some extent the discussion has confirmed many of my prejudices about it. From my reading of it in the past it appears to have been too narrow a focus; that it didn't really develop the sort of active educative process that it should

develop; that it didn't get into, say, parent education or changing the power structure within a bad marriage relationship; it didn't attempt to ginger up the school system or to tie in better with the employers. There are all those things that need to be done. Perhaps that's just another example of something you can throw out in the same way as what Michael was suggesting, but there are all sorts of things that haven't been tried yet at all and I would have thought an attempt by the Brotherhood, using its expertise and linking up with various elements of society within that local area, would help families live better lives and get them out of this cycle of poverty. It still hasn't been demonstrated anywhere. There's every possibility of doing it.

I'm also thinking here of my experience with the Schools Commission and the Country Education Project, thinking to myself that that project has been running ten years and it has gone from strength to strength on exactly the same lines. It's an empowerment model, but the difference between it and this Family Centre Project is that it attacked the system; it didn't just deal with clients. You're all so client-focused, it seems to me. You get the client in some centre and then you work on them somehow or another, they all home in on one another and we have descriptions of violence and you get hung up on who's got the power and who hasn't got the power.

I didn't hear anybody really say that it changed the structure of welfare service delivery in the state, that it altered the way in which people think about it. The Country Education Project did that, because it held onto resources and insisted that people use them in ways that were different from what went on before. That model, of course, had some different elements that I've also not heard mentioned here. For example, it refused to say, (even though it was a Schools Commission Disadvantaged Education Project) that people were "disadvantaged". You're all still saying these people are poor, you know, they're all "the halt, the lame, the sick". They're all victims even though we like to mouth the rhetoric of not blaming the victim. The project is still focused on saying they're poor and I haven't heard anybody tell me that they're not still poor. The Country Education Project said don't tell us about what you need or how deprived and how disadvantaged you are, tell us what resources already exist in the community and tell us what skills you already have. It's based on a competence model, of building competence and what I called at that time "co-operative competence", of developing political power with people sharing resources. They didn't get a penny, not one penny from the central planning committee unless they demonstrated that they had located other resources that could be built on, and unless they demonstrated that they were prepared to share programs across whole country areas.

It wasn't localised, they were huge areas (like the entire Mallee tracks area from Mildura to the Murray, to Sealake and Ouyen). They said you can't share. How can we share between these areas? How can we share between the Catholic system and the private system and the State system? And we said, "well you tell us, you show us how you can share". And they developed programs for parents and kids that did share. I mean the point was again, we said, "We're not focusing just on the clients". The Schools Commission wanted the money only to be used for the children in its schools. That's the narrow bureaucratic definition and we had to fight the Education Department and the Schools Commission to allow us to use the funds to help parents also. Because we argued that you can't educate kids unless you get at the parents as well. In the same way here you can't help the parents unless you also bring the children in.

You've got to get some sort of system going that links resources, builds on what's already there and uses those very limited resources in a way that is cost effective. We're not going to go back to the days of Guaranteed Minimum Income supplements with lots of money for services. That model of building on to services that are already there seems to be the great potential for family support and family services. With a bit of imaginative thinking (and I would have thought that the Brotherhood is ideally placed to do that imaginative thinking), you could show the way. But I can't tell you how it would work or should work in terms of poverty, or welfare, or particular family services because I'm not a service deliverer. I've got a few ideas, but I think perhaps you have got to get up out of the narrow welfare poverty client focus and you've got to become much more politically active. What Sue said was right, the Brotherhood has got a lot of political clout and it ought to be used to demonstrate better ways of utilising resources in a resource deprived time such as we face now. There's a lot of room for innovative programs and they need to be more innovative now than ever.

JEAN McCAUGHEY

I suppose my approach is that I think there's a lot in what Don says but I think the Brotherhood has done a terrific lot to exercise political muscle. An immense amount of time has gone into budget submissions and tax submissions and so on. It's important to go on doing that and there is quite a high profile in that. But I suppose my view is limited because I'm not a professional. I suppose I'm more of an indigenous worker because my experience has been with families, with research into families, both in the work I did with Ronald Henderson and at the Institute of Family Studies. So the thing that strikes me, that is a burden on my conscience, are all those families in this very rich and wealthy community who have quite desperate needs that are not being met.

Importance of independence

Firstly I would have to say that my experience of working with Ronald Henderson and here with Don Edgar, has been that most families put a tremendous store on independence. They want to be independent, they want to solve their own problems, they want to stand on their own feet, and this community puts a tremendously high value on that and I think that's a very good thing. But this community has also set up a kind of society in which it is impossible for a great many people to stand on their own feet. As benefits are pitched under the Poverty Line, how are people going to stand on their own feet? How are people going to live? There are thousands of families that pay more than half their income on rent, how are they going to be able to stand on their own feet? I know this is very "old hat", but I think the biggest problem for needy families in this country is lack of money and lack of housing and bad housing. That's not all the problems, but those are the two most urgent problems. I'm sure that there's not one person in this room will agree with me, but I think that one of the things the Brotherhood should do is start giving emergency aid to families, for they don't have enough money to pay the rent, and they risk being evicted. They don't have enough money to pay the gas bill or whatever, and I think we should give material aid to families that are in crisis. There are a great many families that are in crisis.

Personal networks

The second thing I want to say is that not all families that are under the Poverty Line are poor families. Some of them have a very rich and supportive family life that would put many middle class families to shame. It seems to me that from the Geelong study that one of the most important things that came out was the sort of personal networks that families have to call on, which is usually their extended family, their friends, their neighbours, and people in the community. That's the most important thing for anybody. I was interested to hear someone say the other day that the greatest incidence of homelessness is amongst people who have no personal networks. I would say from the work in the Geelong study that by far the most important thing is for a family to have personal networks. So if they can't pay the rent or something, they can go to their brother or their mother or somebody, "lend me \$50 till I get my next pension cheque".

Now why is it that some have families with good personal networks and others don't? I think the main reason is the kind of families they grew up in. People that grew up in a family with good family relationships and good relationships with the community outside tend to reproduce the same families. Those who grew up in isolated families tend to reproduce isolated families.

The second cause I think is poverty, because poverty just prevents people taking part in the common life of this country. About 80% of people in this country are comfortably-off and most of them don't have too many problems with personal networks and all the rest of it because they can take part in the life of the community. For example, a poor single mother goes to the parents' talk at school or the kindergarten and she feels that she's not part of them because she doesn't have the right clothes. Probably she's touchy, and feels they're all stuck-up and she doesn't belong with them. The third reason is that people have problems that are not socially acceptable problems, like excess drinking, domestic violence, having a handicapped child or having psychiatric problems. All those things that create the great needs for families are also the things that prevent them from having their own personal networks. That was the point I wanted to make about personal networks.

As far as services are concerned, everybody has their own stake or contribution to make. Some people, maybe it's the professionals, maybe it's not all the professionals, have the skill of knowing how to run the service and to organise it. Other people, maybe who are not professionals, have a far more important role to make setting up caring relationships. I think we can talk too much about power and giving people power. We have to remember, I think it was Lord Acton, who said, "all power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely". What we want is not to give people power but to give them the ability to care for each other.

I remember once coming out of church, near a big block of Housing Commission flats and I said to a friend of mine: "Here we are all good Christian people. We go over there in that block of Housing Commission flats and there are lots of families that are in despair, in loneliness, and the rest of it. As far as they're concerned we might as well be on the moon." My friend said to me, "Yes, but you have to realise that the resources to meet those needs are also within those Housing Commission flats." Somehow we've got to enable people to set up their own networks and to learn how to care for each other. I think it's not an easy thing to do in services but I think it can be done. I know one agency which is now trying to work a very deprived area, trying to get a family, maybe a family on low income, but a family that's coping well, to adopt another family that's isolated and try to bring them into things. Now this is an immensely difficult job and they have got very, very, good and caring social workers trying to do this but I think that whole business of helping people to set up their own networks is enormously important.

Inaccessibility of services

If I could say one more thing about the Geelong study. The experience there was that there were some very good agencies in Geelong, but there are a great number of families with really very desperate needs who never reach those agencies and don't even know about their existence. Now I think we tend too much to set up an agency and then it is the responsibility of the people that need it to find it. And I think that we've got to go out much more and find the people that need the services and to do that we have to go to places that are what I call universal. We have to go to Infant Welfare Centres and we have to go to schools; I think that very often in primary schools teachers know what the families are up against, when things are not going well. I think we can build on to that resource.

Child care services

Lastly, I want to say that I think as far as family support services are concerned, child-care is the key service. What I would like to see is child-care on a geographic grid, like primary schools, so that every family will be within walking distance of a child-care service. That not only would relieve families of the responsibility of looking after the children twenty-four hours a day, it would also be a focus for the community where people could meet and perhaps they would begin to create their own caring networks.

LEN TIERNEY

My contribution to this seminar is primarily to state why I had stayed apart from the perceptions and messages of the Family Centre. Some people may be unaware that there was a predecessor to the Family Centre, about 1955-1962, the Family Service Project, also undertaken by the Brotherhood of St Laurence. Basically the latter project set about to find housing and income solutions for families who had been rejected as unsuitable tenants.

Family Service Project (BSL)

Although the Family Service Project ended in 1962 I was left unsatisfied. There were substantial changes in the lives of these families. But why they had their troubles and what led to change was something of a mystery. So I continued to stay in touch with 60 families for a period of 17 years. The outcomes were variable, but could best be explained as due to independent family action, the process of time, and environmental factors. This is not to say that at the time the Brotherhood help had not been deeply appreciated. The longer term solution to their troubles had,

however, been independent of Brotherhood action. In reading the literature of the Family Centre my impression was that in this respect there was no difference with the Family Service Project.

Peter Hollingworth has suggested that different decades bring forth different solutions. Hence the Family Service Project could be regarded as a typical response of the 1950s and the Family Centre, a response of the 1960s. This would assume that the language of description was also tied to the times. However, his question "What is appropriate for the 1980s" surely does not bind us to transient definition and transient answers.

Time scales

My own findings point in a different direction and that there are some possibilities of firmer ground. Families need to be seen in socio-historical context but they are characterised by much longer periods of time than a mere decade or so. They develop strategies of their own to attempt to deal with changing events and situations. The helping agencies, however, perceive families in short spans of time so we have the paradox of family strategies and agency strategies proceeding according to different laws. I am reasonably confident that families can be understood and that we can do better, but the real issue is generalisability. Of any finding, of any program we can ask "Why should we believe you?". The answer surely cannot just be that it is convenient to do so. I am apprehensive about generating attitudes which will promote criteria based on convenience.

JAN CARTER

A lot of what today is all about is trying to provide a continuity with the past that those of us who are working in the present may be able to link with the future. So it seemed appropriate at the end of the day for David Scott to provide us with that continuity.

DAVID SCOTT

Overview: where should the BSL go?

I have been asked to try not to summarise, but to draw out of the papers and discussions what I think is relevant to a discussion on what the Brotherhood might do that could be helpful to families. We need to look at the Family Centre and ARC in three contexts.

Professionalism

First, in their own context, Connie, Hayden, David Green and Jan King have discussed the internal dynamics of the Family Centre and then later on of ARC. One issue that we still continue to agonise over after 15 years is "professionalism", and what it means to indigenous workers and professionals. Peter began by saying that a professional is someone who professes something. The term also has other connotations that denote status, power, standards, superiority, inferiority, or just people with different kinds of skills. We need to clarify and have some agreement so that we can come to terms with the issue.

I was interested in Connie's comment that starting again, she would begin with new staff. I am not sure what she meant, but it seemed to me that what she and others did in those early days in bringing together to start the original Family Centre, people with different backgrounds, was very significant in itself. I used to say to people this is one of the most interesting exercises. No longer are there the hierarchies of social worker, youth worker, research worker, welfare officer. They are all Family Centre workers with different skills to contribute. So whilst it might have complicated Connie's work and taken up time, it was an important exercise in ironing out skill differentials.

Relationships between people

The issue of how people related to one another would be important in setting up another project like the Family Centre. It would also be necessary to take up David Green's comments about the Centre becoming a closed community. I am sure that this enhanced the families' sense of belonging. Working, and almost living completely with a group of some 60 families, and a few staff, whom they were familiar with, also increased self confidence.

On the other hand, the Centre may have become too introverted. It might have been more successful in conveying what it was about if it had developed stronger links with outside agencies and groups.

Family Service Project

I am pleased that Len Tierney made mention of the Family Service Project which was a 1960s experiment in using social work skills in working closely with a group of families living in Camp Pell, an emergency housing settlement in Royal Park. Before and after the Second World War, the Brotherhood also focussed on the interaction between low income people and their housing. Looking back, it seems that certain ideological or professional views dominated each stage often to the exclusion of other approaches.

Fashions change

Casework, group work, community organisation, guaranteed minimum income, consultation, participation, universalism, selectivity, self-help, social action, developmental work, have had their periods of high fashion and are then largely abandoned. There has been insufficient recognition of the need for progression and for the complementarity of many strategies and techniques of working with people and changing community perception and resource allocation. For example, although the Family Centre was based on a newly evolved developmental model, I think it was unfortunate that there was no casework resource available to assist families with the personal and inter-personal difficulties that are common to people in all socio-economic settings.

Impact of FCP and ARC on the BSL

Hearing the accounts of other speakers reminded me of my view that the Family Centre and ARC inhibited the Brotherhood in its social and political action activities. Intentionally or unintentionally, the view was developed that if you were not poor you could not speak about poverty. I can understand that it was important to give people who had been "put down" over many years, or even generations, the confidence to speak for themselves, but there was a swing to the other extreme which almost rejected the

view that people who were not themselves poor might also want to bring about changes that would make the society in which we all live a fairer one.

Multiple objectives

Earlier speakers have pointed out that it is not sufficient to set up a good demonstration project. If change of attitudes and political priorities is needed, more attention has to be given to strategies for ensuring that the lessons of a demonstration project are understood and accepted by others. Reflecting on the Family Centre and other demonstration and pilot projects, it seems that one of the problems in assessing results is that we have multiple objectives, which give us the opportunity to trade one objective against another and make performance measurement difficult.

I recall, for example, how, when the Brotherhood's Donated Goods Division was not achieving a budgetted profit, we excused this by saying that we were giving away more clothes. This made it impossible to measure the efficiency of the business operation and the converse applied if we did not have sufficient clothing to meet the distribution needs.

There is still much to be teased out and learned from the internal dynamics of the project, and I am glad that Jenny Trethewey and David Green are continuing their work on a critical account.

Let's move now to the second context which is the Family Centre and ARC and its relationship to the self-help and welfare sector.

FCP in context

It is true that the project did give encouragement and demonstrated new approaches that helped self-help organisations, but it was not the only influence. The War Against Poverty in the U.S., Ryan's book Blaming the Victim, and Saul Alinsky's examples and writings were among other significant influences. So too was Brian Howe, who returned from the States and transformed the old Fitzroy Ecumenical Centre into CURA; a centre popularising the notion that people could, and should, exercise more control over their lives.

Participation and leadership

In some ways the swing from being controlled by many "control agents" to ill-defined notions of participation, was too extreme and rapid. In some instances everyone was obliged to participate in all decisions. This often led to paralysis. An English study has referred to the "tyranny of structurelessness". The objective should have been to decide who participated in making what

decisions and in having clearly understood structures. This emerged as ARC progressed. Extreme acceptance of participation in all decision making also denies and rejects the notion of leadership.

The old fashioned view of unquestioning loyalty to leaders, regardless of the basis of leadership, had to be challenged, but leadership on a different basis is essential if any organisation wants to be effective in the political world and in its relations with other organisations. How you elect or appoint leaders, their term of office, how they are changed, accountability, and the mandate they have, are all matters that must be clear, but the need for people recognised as leaders should not be denied. The success of Aboriginal organisations in achieving a central political role is due to acceptance of leadership and their commitment and political skills.

Impact on professional agencies

What impact did the Family Centre and ARC have on professional agencies? I think it was very important in conveying a different perspective about the nature of poverty and of poor people. The dominant view was that poor people were unable to provide, or make decisions, for themselves. The project showed that this was not so. It demonstrated that given reasonable resources and opportunities and some experience, people labelled "poor" were capable of many achievements.

ARC support workers showed that they could acquire skills and gave officers in government, estate agencies, hospitals, the law, and education, an understanding and respect for people who might be poor in a material sense but who certainly were not poor in respect to many other qualities.

Some professional agencies tended to be cynical, perhaps because the Family Centre represented such a break with the past, and was implicitly a criticism of conventional response to need. We should have worked harder to develop a clearer understanding.

The third context is that of the wider community, especially those who make or influence political decisions.

Structural social reform

What impact did the Brotherhood, the Family Centre, and ARC have on structural issues? If we judge on broad social indicators we must admit we had little or no influence. There are many more people in poverty than there were 10 years ago and there is less political interest in poverty issues now than then. The number of people on public housing lists has almost doubled and there are still more than 600,00 unemployed. This is almost the same number as when the Hawke Government came into power and the lengthening of the duration of unemployment to an average of more than 50

weeks means that many of them have been out of work for two years and more. Job creation and assistance schemes are being terminated. Income security provisions have become more selective and in some cases punitive.

If these are measures of our ability to influence public opinion, then we have failed dismally.

Australia in the 80s

Other speakers referred to the optimism of the 60s and 70s and the social justice initiative, many of which came from the United States. There was, in Australia, a rhetoric about improving society, and ideals to work for. Today the atmosphere is remarkably different. Australian society has seldom been more individualistic or dominated by the imperatives of commercialism. People are being made to feel less and less self-sufficient and more dependent on goods and services provided for profit. There is a negative attitude to income security and social welfare provisions. Michelle Grattan in the Age yesterday speculated on the silence of the usually vocal "New Right", and concluded that they don't have much to protest about and regard Prime Minister Hawke as an honorary member. The atmosphere is not conducive to the development of services, structures and attitudes that will strengthen low income families and reduce poverty, poor housing, and unemployment.

We have been asked to suggest ways in which the Brotherhood can now work to benefit low income families.

The Brotherhood's other traditional role has been in education, social and political action. My work in recent years on the Committee of Review of the Victoria Police, with the Land Conservation Council, as Commissioner for the Environment, and as a Committee Member of Community Aid Abroad, has given me the chance to look at the influencing role of three policy sectors: conservation and environment; international aid; and social welfare and social justice.

Conservation movement

It seems to me that the conservation sector is way ahead of the others in the effectiveness of its public education and lobbying, and this is borne out by the priority given to environmental issues at the recent Federal election. The conservationists claimed, and the government agreed, that some seven seats were won or would have been lost but for conservation campaigns and influence on policies. The conservationists realised that they have to compete for political attention and resources with bodies like the National Farmers Federation with a \$15 million fighting fund, the sawmillers and timber industry, the mining industry, and all the other well-resourced interest groups. They don't have

much money, but they do have a high degree of commitment, political judgement, and skill in attracting public and media attention to environmental issues.

International aid

The international aid organisations have also been systematic, committed, and creative in their campaigns to maintain government aid expenditure. Their 1986 campaign resulted in a draft appropriation that would have been satisfactory until it was cut by Keating when the dollar dropped dramatically.

Welfare sector

If results are the measure of success, the 30,000 voluntary organisations involved in some way with welfare, housing, and employment have not been successful. There have been some gains but the situation of vulnerable people with respect to income, housing, employment, and services is worse than for many years.

ACOSS, the Brotherhood, and a few other organisations draw attention to deficiencies and argue for specific reforms, but the welfare sector has not yet come of age politically. We still have several "peak" councils. The farmers realised this weakness years ago and brought all interest groups into one body with special interest groups represented within the overall body. The Japanese Council of Social Welfare, which is very effective, has the same structure.

Years ago there was little research. We had to know more and be able to support our proposals before we could hope to be listened to. Now we know a great deal about the situation of families and what keeps them poor and outside the mainstream. The Institute of Family Studies, the Social Welfare Research Centre, the Brotherhood and others beaver away at research, but the urgent need now is to ensure that it is taken account of through social action initiatives. We need a strategy for social development that argues for new measures and attitudes in the context of the political and economic realities. An anti-poverty led, economic development strategy is quite possible but it is seldom seen to be when we have all been persuaded that social and economic development are in conflict.

Need for a political agenda

There is a need to establish a political agenda on welfare issues, organise the sector behind an agreed program, abandon inhibitions about engaging in "politics" and emulate the commitment and political sensitivity of the conservation movement. The best way for the Brotherhood to assist low income families would be for it to develop and campaign for such a strategy.

PART 2 DEBATES AND DISCUSSIONS

Introduction

The format for this seminar was organised to allow for lengthy periods of discussion and debate. It was felt that much of the value of the day would be in the more informal discussions between the speakers and the twenty or so invited guests.

There were five periods of questions and discussion following groups of speakers, including a discussion of the future of services to low income families.

FIRST DISCUSSION PERIOD

Introduction

The first discussion followed the first four speakers. Jan Carter as chairperson had introduced the seminar. Then Peter Hollingworth discussed how the project began, his involvement in this beginning process, and some retrospective thoughts on major issues that came out of the FCP. This was followed by Hayden Raysmith talking about what were the essential principles in the FCP and why they are worth keeping. Ruby Canham (Co-ordinator of ARC) then talked about what is working in ARC today.

Indigenous Workers

The opening question concerned employment of Family Centre members. In the third and final year of the Family Centre, and then in ARC, a number of family members were employed as staff. Because they came from the same social background as other members they became known as indigenous workers. The philosophy behind this practice of employing indigenous workers was that it was an important part of the empowerment of low income people to give them jobs, and that it would improve the quality of services offered as the indigenous workers would have an empathetic understanding of the problems that low income people faced.

Lack of employment for indigenous workers

The first question came from Ray Walters, who was a teenager at the time of the Family Centre, was the first member to be employed as an indigenous worker in the project (in the coffee shop area of the Centre). After making the point that professional FCP staff had put enormous effort into developing, supporting, and employing family members, Ray asked the question:

It seems that the concept you were all working with was training indigenous workers to accept positions of responsibility. How come that the only place that will accept indigenous workers still is ARC? When it comes to advice on certain issues you ask ARC, but when it comes to employing someone with that sort of knowledge from that background then ARC doesn't exist.

Hayden Raysmith, who was co-ordinator of ARC from 1975 to 1978, responded to Ray's question by saying that this was only partly true, as self-help groups employed considerable numbers of indigenous workers and there were a lot of people from low income backgrounds employed and trained in the public service."But if you mean, has the Brotherhood or the Melbourne City Mission been overrun with workers that used to be employed at ARC, obviously that hasn't happened".

Hayden then argued that having indigenous workers might not be the right way to go about employing people from low income background, saying:

I think what that demonstrates is that that sort of organisation isn't necessarily the right stepping stone for somebody to move out of a basic level of employment and skill development that they've got. I think we need to think about what all the other stepping stones might be.

Indigenous workers and lack of power

Ray Walters then went on to argue that the real issue here was power, and that professionals, such as those taking part in the seminar, still held the real power. Groups, such as you find in the self-help movement, could have their funding cut off "if they buck the system".

Hayden Raysmith responded to Ray's comment by making a distinction between executive power and democratic power. He argued that the "people at the top" aren't going to give up their executive power."I think the reality is that none of us will give up power. I'm not going to give up my position of power to give it to you, for example". Hayden went on to say that he was "quite happy to keep on helping others get a leg-up", and we needed to develop organisational structures that can accommodate both democratic and executive power.

Aboriginal people and indigenous workers

Peter Hollingworth then came in with the comment that Aboriginal groups employ their own people, as another example of indigenous workers.

Traineeships in the BSL

Peter then went on to say that the BSL was still committed to employing people from disadvantaged backgrounds, but now we were doing it differently through traineeships for young people that would give them jobs within the "mainstream of welfare".

Cost of training indigenous workers

Peter argued that the process of training indigenous workers through the FCP and ARC "was a long and expensive one and I don't think we've got the mechanisms to do that now".

Marketable skills

David Scott, Director of the BSL at the time of the FCP, then came in with a comment on the transfer of skills in the FCP and the importance of marketable skills. He argued that the transfer of skills that took place was "learning by doing" and while this was fine in itself, it "didn't help people to acquire marketable skills". He went on to say that it was not just a question of providing training places for people from disadvantaged groups. People from these groups must also feel that education is relevant to them and that they "could make a great contribution with some of those more marketable skills".

David used an example from a recent TAFE seminar where very ambitious affirmative employment programs for various disadvantaged groups were presented, but there had been no consideration of how those disadvantaged groups might consider those opportunities.

Jan Carter then came in with the comment that we now have a better understanding of what we mean by "transferring skills" than we did in the early 70s. She went on to argue that the shift from transferring skills to indigenous workers in the FCP to traineeships in the BSL in the 80s was because of broader social changes, such as the huge increase in unemployment.

Inadequacy of professionals

Jan King, who worked in ARC in the early 80s, then commented that there was another important element to this issue of indigenous workers:

and that is the difference between the professionals being absolutely brilliant in theory but not being able in practice to work with people who are particularly disadvantaged. We have some very interesting examples of that in my organisation (Collingwood Council's welfare services) at the moment in aged services, where there's been a big injection of new funds. We are now starting

to professionalise that area of work, which has traditionally been an area for disadvantaged workers, particularly women who have returned to the work force. The level of intolerance that is displayed by those people who are now just moving into the market to those workers, many of whom have been working for fifteen or twenty years, is just a constant source of amazement to me. There is almost an assumption that because you've been there for fifteen or twenty years you ought to be able to sit down and write a policy document. If you can't discuss a policy document at the level at which staff require you to, then really you should be dismissed. So I think there hasn't been a change in the focus and the thinking of those people in the sector that would take account of some of the concerns that Ray raises.

Jan Carter

So are you saying there are two groups of people, those that have had the experience and those who haven't?

Jan King

Yes. And I think that says something about our teachings and the development of social work skills.

Importing skilled labour

Somebody then came in with the comment that we: "we tend to import skilled labour. We're not very good at training it, particularly in our organisations." He then went on to argue:

that this sector generally does not have the management skills to support and train indigenous workers or indeed train any other workers very well, on-the-job. We generally rely on bringing people in who have those skills, and who have gone and acquired those qualifications elsewhere, at tertiary institutions or wherever. I think that works against low income people, and I think that is an issue we need to address fairly seriously.

Barriers in access to jobs and resources

David Brous, who worked as a researcher ARC from in the 70s (two years), then argued that there were continuing barriers to people from disadvantaged backgrounds in getting access to resources and jobs, and that these barriers were caused by creating new strata within organisations such as ARC and the BSL. He argued that within ARC, for example, "your position did determine your access to resources. Single people could never get the same type of

access to resources as families." He went on to say that what we are seeing now is the creation of new strata of jobs, which automatically excludes some groups, as "the ability to jump between strata is very difficult."

Adult education in Victoria

Len Tierney then came in to comment that the problem lay with our education system, because:

adult education in Victoria at the moment is not structured to provide access. It is not properly integrated through the TAFE system, or the other Institute or College processes, to give proper access to people at all. That's where the real power blockage lies. Neither the Brotherhood or the ARC is going to break through that until you get a new appreciation and a better recognition of life experience.

Marketable skills

Len went on to say that we needed an integrated approach where people learn marketable skills and progress from learning simple skills to more complex ones. He argued that existing programs, such as open entry and adult entry, were inadequate because they are "not built into a graded system". Len went on to cite the Head Start program in the United States as an example of a graded system where people could progress from "cutting oranges and listening to the kids read" through to more responsible and better paid jobs through a system of formal training.

Continuing the discussion of skill acquisition, Michael Liffman, research worker in the Family Centre Project, argued that we can't define the skills that professional or indigenous workers have. He went on to say that even if we all devised our own shopping lists of what these skills are, then who has the right to decide which are the appropriate ones? He further speculated that if the people at the seminar reached agreement on what the required skills were and designed a course around them:

I'm not sure that it would look very different from conventional schools of social work or training institutions.

It seems that the very kernel of the issue is what do people need to have in order to work in the roles that we're talking about, and who has the right to decree that unless you've got those things you can't work there?

Training in the social and community services sector

As a wind up for the tea-break, Jan Carter then came in with the comment that training was a very neglected area in our sector, and that the BSL had a working party looking "at the kind of training that organisations like the BSL should be supporting". Jan followed this with the observation that:

I think there is a tendency for those of us who have not been involved in the Family Centre Project or ARC to look at them as a sort of ideal type. This is probably quite wrong because in many ways the Family Centre and ARC mirror many of the features of organisations in the outside world, such as social stratification, politics, it depends on who you know, and questions about the way resources are devolved.

SECOND DISCUSSION SESSION

Introduction

Following the tea-break, Michael Liffman gave a talk on the role of innovation, and how did the FCP percolate through the sector and become so influential? This was followed by Jan King and then David Green talking about unintended consequences of the FCP, with Jan concentrating on practical problems that developed in ARC, and David discussing the issue in a theoretical framework.

Power over relationships between members

One of the key points that David Green made concerned the issue of power over relationships. He argued in his talk that while the concept of power over relationships was well developed in the FCP when it came to relationships between staff and members, it was very poorly developed when it came to relationships and power and conflict between members.

David Brous began the discussion by arguing that conflict between members had been partly documented in ARC research. David Green responded:

Yes, I'm sorry. That is correct. I should have been more precise. What I'm saying is that in terms of its being documented in its relevance to the developmental model and to the theory, I believe it is inadequate. The recognition of the impact on that, both on the integrity of the theory and on some of the outcomes is inadequate. Would you agree?

David Brous

I do. Jan King made the earlier point about the lack of documentation about the role of the support workers. I think both those two things are significant gaps in the terms of the importance they have.

Demonstration projects

David Green commented:

that we needed a much clearer notion about the way a demonstration project should be set up and structured, which I think the Brotherhood has done.

Culture and the FCP

David Green also commented on the issue of culture and the FCP. He argued that:

it is important to be more aware of the possibilities which are associated with cultural change, and perhaps running with that more explicitly. One of unintended consequences of the FCP was, that given the high profile nature of its claims to major structural change, that some of the actual benefits of cultural change were not developed as much as they could have been.

Therapeutic communities

Jan then made the point that we could learn from other fields of work on issues like participation, but how little knowledge permeates from one area to another. As an example of this, she talked about the concept of the therapeutic community in the mental health area which was about "democratising medical model services" and had "a very strong commitment to democracy and participation.

It used a method called "reality confrontation. This was very basically the idea that you level with people constantly about their behaviour, in a micro situation, so that the tendency for organisations to develop anarchic patterns of behaviour was overcome.

So it could well be that there are other types of social systems that might have gone a long way towards solving some of the problems of a democratic organisation becoming anarchic that we've been talking about.

THIRD DISCUSSION PERIOD

Introduction

Lunch was then taken. After lunch, Conne Benn, co-ordinator of the FCP spoke on what things she would have done differently in the project with the view of hindsight. Jan Carter asked Connie the first question:

So was it worth it? Would you do it again?

Connie

Oh of course. I think we have had an enormous impact on welfare in Victoria, perhaps in Australia. Oh yes, would do it again.

Role of support

Sue Kirkguard, who works in a family service organisation, then asked Connie to comment on the role of support in the FCP, especially given Connie's reputation "as the most supportive of the lot".

Connie responded to Sue's question by discussing the notion of "sharing and caring."

You can put it in one sentence if you like: you get what you give. So if I need support then I have to give a lot.

I think that what people are forgetting is that the families gave us a lot; a lot of support, a lot more support than I think many of us would actually talk about. But I have seen workers reduced to tears and I have seen them been comforted by family people. So it went both ways. But I think it is more than support. Support is a very wet word to me. It is a sharing of yourself with other people.

Impact of FCP on BSL

Somebody then asked Connie to comment on how ideas coming out of the FCP could have had more influence on the BSL as an organisation. Connie responded:

I think we acted isolationist, almost on purpose. We shouldn't have done that. We should have been much more outgoing. We should have invited Brotherhood workers and

other Brotherhood consumers into the Centre. I think we should have tried to develop with them some sort of common approach to things.

I think we could have also taken much more of an advocacy role; much more of a lobbying role if you like. I don't think the one or two attempts Hayden made at direct action were enough. We might have tried a little more direct action. We didn't and I don't know why we didn't. I think we were trying to almost protect ourselves as a group of people of families and staff. We were trying to protect ourselves while we developed.

But I think if we had a few more years we might have reached out to the organisation, not only in direct action ways, but in less conflictual ways. We could have reached out to the organisation and tried to introduce, for example, the notion of indigenous workers in other places in the Brotherhood. We could have tried to get the notion across to the welfare field that people had skills that they weren't using. We could have done a lot more of that sort of thing, and we didn't do it.

I think we should have also insisted a little more on things like staff and consumer participation in the decision making processes of the Brotherhood. I think we could have developed those things much earlier if we had really put our minds to it.

Disseminating the lessons

Don Edgar, Director of the Australian Institute of Family Studies, then asked what the original plans were for disseminating the lessons of the FCP, especially given that it was set up as a demonstration project. Connie responded:

Well I think we thought things like the guaranteed minimum income would take off. We thought that we would show the world that this is what worked; that you did break the cycle of poverty; that people did help themselves to improve their skills once they had a guaranteed income.

We had employment programs and skill development programs and we thought that we would be really making lessons for government to pick up, as the Brotherhood has done many times in the past. We thought that there were lessons there that government could learn from and copy.

I never did think that there would be thousands of little family centres all over the place. That wasn't what I would have seen as replication. It was the ideas that were important. We were trying to say that what people need when they're poor is money and a roof over their head and a job. They were the things we were trying to say. We accept those things now, but they were pretty radical ideas at the time. People don't need counselling and a hand-out; they need jobs and they need money. We were trying to demonstrate those things and I think we probably did to a certain extent.

Falling between two stools

Peter Hollingworth, Director of community Services in the BSL during the FCP, commented that the FCP "fell between two stools" in that it "was neither a Brotherhood service program, nor was it totally independent."

Peter went on to talk about the problems that this caused:

From the BSL end whatever ARC did we had to wear anyway, as everyone saw it as our thing no matter what we said. From the ARC end, I think it was a bit on the fringes by not being part of mainstream services within the BSL, and the natural interaction one would expect between departments didn't happen.

So in a sense I think there was a structural problem in the initial positing of the service. Maybe with the benefit of hindsight that could have been something we did differently.

SPAN contrasted with the FCP

Connie commented that "SPAN became an autonomus organisation and the Brotherhood assisted with that". Peter agreed that this had been the intention "from day one," but that:

there was an open ended future about the Family Centre Project which I think caused a lot of difficulty, and pain, and a sense of rejection by the families that Jan King talked about.

I suppose in this day and age, one would draw up contracts and we'd tie a lot of things up so that none of the partners would be confused about the future and about expectations.

David Brous then commented that SPAN had another advantage in terms of its independence in that:

it wasn't near the BSL in Brunswick Street, Fitzroy. I think one of the difficulties for ARC was that it was just over the back.

Peter

Hanging on the coat tails all the time.

David Brous

Both ways. It wasn't only a matter of people from ARC waltzing across to Brunswick Street. With respect, all you (Peter) had to do was look out your window, and you could see across to what was happening at ARC.

David went on to argue that in future the BSL should locate services that it wants to become independent away from its offices in Brunswick Street.

Peter raised the problem of adjusting to ARC as a new organisation developing out of the FCP.

It was a different organisation, and that too was very hard for the so called parent organisation to deal with. It was what you got used to and next day it was something different. One day it is here and the next day it is not.

Independant funding for ARC

Connie recalled the efforts that SPAN made to get independent funding and speculated that they should have made more effort to have ARC financially independent of the BSL.

Peter responded:

I think we tried, but it was 1975 and the crash had come. I am also arguing that one develops innovative programs and puts a lot of money into them in times of economic abundance, and it becomes a lot more difficult to sustain that when times are tough. When the second triennium began, it was certainly a leaner period. I don't think, that with the change of government, anybody other than the Brotherhood would have put a cracker into it.

Ray Walters, original FCP member, then argued that "ARC had independence in some ways but not in others" and that ARC should have become independent of the BSL two years after it opened. "I thought it was the initial plan to encourage us to do that by building up enough trust." Ray also said that part of the problem

was that "professionals had a lack of confidence in ARC itself to take that independence." Connie interjected that "I think some of the families didn't want to sever that connection either."

Jan then thanked people for their contribution so far, and commented that "I think the benefit of hindsight in terms of practice, yes or no, has been very helpful."

FOURTH DISCUSSION PERIOD - FUTURE OF BSL SERVICES

Introduction

Jan introduced the next session as an open discussion of the future of BSL services for families. The task set was to imagine that the BSL had \$5 million to spend on services, and to discuss the best way of spending that money.

I want to propose that we spend the next twenty minutes in an open session where we try to look at the issue of the way perhaps the Brotherhood might consider expending resources on family projects in the next few years.

I suppose there is an issue of whether the Brotherhood should continue its past role of seeding innovations in this particular area, or whether we should be content to offer good basic family services, given the level of need in terms of child and family poverty that did not exist fifteen years ago.

After a short relaxation break, Peter Hollingworth introduced the issue that he wanted to consult the group about:

In about three weeks time we will have our heads of staff seminar at Avalon and I have nussed out a G.O.S.P.A. statement for the Brotherhood which is goals, objectives, strategies, plans, action.

There are a number of things that this organisation, as a multi-purpose organisation, must renew its commitment to do. One of them is to renew that commitment to working in a very direct way with families who are largely locked out of mainstream institutional opportunities within the society, and who have increasing difficulty in surviving in the economic hazards of today. Whatever the term is you want to use, I think we all understand we are talking about those who have got the least. Now the real question that we have to address is: what is the appropriate way in which we ought to work with them? As the document that was handed out as background material clearly indicates we have resources. We have come to one of those points at Limurru historically where the thing has gone the full circle. The chance is, not only to crank the thing up again, but to develop new structures, new directions, and maybe new objectives.

This is where the organisation is at the moment, and particularly so in the area of family services. It represents one of those important historic opportunities that don't come more than once about every twenty or thirty years. So I think it is quite right to ask ourselves what can we learn from this important experience in the Family Centre and ARC, and how do we start to apply those messages and lessons into the process of restructuring Limurru family and neighbourhood services and the direction that they go?

Location of excluded families

Connie began the discussion by asking whether any demographic work had been done on where "excluded families" are located. Peter responded that:

They are "diversified all over the shop. They are still in Fitzroy, they are still in Collingwood, and they are in Broadmeadows and in Thomastown, and Lalor and wherever there is public housing and where there is relatively low cost run down housing.

Location of BSL services

Ray Walters then argued that the problem was that BSL services for families were located in the inner suburbs, and what about locating services "outside the metropolitan area where people don't have access to resources". Peter responded by saying that:

there are problems in simply going where you are wanted. You just cannot pack up and plonk yourself down somewhere. You are likely to cause an enormous uproar, with people who have local government vested interests or regional vested interests.

Peter went on to outline a regionalisation agreement between anglican agencies where they had agreed to concentrate their work in particular geographic areas, "one in the Western suburbs, one in the East and so on." He added that "we have been the ones who have been recognised as putting a lot of our energy into the inner city.

Len Tierney then went back to an earlier point about where excluded families are located, and commented that:

a lot of these families are unsettled rather than mobile. You follow them over three or five years and they have been in seven or eight places.

Jan Carter then raised the question of whether therefore "we should think about mobile services, as I think the Europeans do from time to time?"

Local Government services

David Brous then raised the question as to what the future role of the BSL should be in providing services to families:

now that local government is much more vibrant in terms of its service delivery role, and it is not just the Fitzroys of the world, but the Avocas, the Altonas and so on..

Jan responded by raising the question:

that since there are now so many innovators operating in this sector, does that mean that the distinctive past contribution of the Brotherhood in terms of innovation is perhaps not as necessary now, and should it get on with the job of providing a good basic service?

Consultancy Service

Michael Liffman then suggested that "the Brotherhood could provide a sophisticated high level consultancy service." This suggestion was discussed, criticised, and then abandoned. Criticisms ranged from doubts as to whether the BSL had the necessary skill-base to concerns that this would lead the BSL away from providing services to excluded families.

On the question of skills, Len Tierney made the comment that:

unless you are involved in the actual practice of doing something, you cannot contribute on that level.

Ruby Canham then expressed concern that if the BSL became involved in being a consultant, it would get out of touch with families on low incomes:

I think that if you are going to have all these consultancies ... then you are getting away from helping low income people. Even the language you are even using here today, people just can't grasp it. How can low income people with very little skills come and ask you questions or get services from you.

David Brous suggested a variation of Michael Liffman's consultancy service concept, saying that:

there is a role for the Brotherhood to establish a process of transferring the principles which have developed within the Brotherhood's services into outside organisations.

ARC view

Ruby Canham, Co-ordinator of ARC, then talked about what services she would like to see developed for low income families:

I think there should be more resources for low income people, but have the freedom of choice to use those resources, whether they are from professionals or indigenous workers.

In response to a question from Jan Carter, if she would like to see more ARCs, Ruby said:

No I wouldn't like to see more ARCs. One ARC is enough really. But I would like to see similar programs.

We have got three generations at ARC now. What I can see is the good is just starting to come from those families. Kids are just starting to stay at high school. At fifteen they used to leave and try and get a job or just run around the streets. They are not having babies as soon as they leave school.

You shouldn't expect to get a lot out of this generation. If we are going to do anything we should have input into the kids to break that cycle, because the only thing you are going to get out of it is the next generation.

If you had a mum and you were supporting that person, you might say how about coming down and having your hair done or getting new clothes, and then come back into looking at the child. So you are supporting families but you are putting input in so that the next generation gives us a change.

Social Work Service

Michael Liffman then suggested that the BSL set up a social work service, rearmed with what has been learnt over the last fifteen or so years; a form of re-professionalisation following a period of de-professionalisation and anti-professionalism.

Sue Kirkguard then suggested that the BSL set up an after hours services to families. She argued that many families need such a service, and yet it is not provided and it is not possible to get government funding for after hours services. She went on to say that:

it is the BSL's strength to break new ground. Because of its political clout, the BSL is able to open up new areas for government funding, such as providing after hours services to families.

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION PERIOD

Introduction

Don Edgar, Len Tierney, and Jean McCaughey then briefly made some comments on family services and on the Family Centre and what we had learnt from it, as persons who were not directly involved in the project. This was then followed by David Scott who gave his thoughts on the day's proceedings and the future direction that services to families might take.

Buying back the farm

Hayden Raysmith began the concluding discussion period by arguing that non-Government organisations had gone through an awkward time in adapting to working with Labor Governments and:

learning the new rules of the game ... peak bodies have become too much owned by government ... what we are told is impossible, leaves us tinkering with the edges rather than redefining the debate in a fashion that is appropriate to the sorts of constituents we are speaking on behalf of.

Hayden went on to say that:

there should be resources from the non-Government sector to effectively buy back the peak bodies, with a clear political agenda along the lines that David [Scott] is talking about. If the Brotherhood showed the lead in helping to buy back the farm, it could be an enormous force for re-defining the sector in some sort of leadership, vanguard way.

Len Tierney supported this view that peak bodies had become too closely aligned to government, and commented that:

they are leaving their constituency bodies behind; limp and lame and often just bewildered as to how they might individually act.

He argued that leadership skills are usually centralised in coalitions of voluntary agencies, and that they need to be directed back into those "voluntary agencies to help to mobilise themselves better".

Lateral economic thinking

David Scott then argued that we needed to have some lateral economic thinking about how the welfare sector could argue its case for more resources. As one example, he argued that expenditure on public rental housing could be justified on the basis that it "creates many more jobs and spin-offs and downstream values. You reduce the number of unemployed and so you get the deficit down."

The comment was then made that:

Peter Sheahan was running the line very early in the economic debates (1987?) that if you give money to people on low income they'll spend it.

Jan Carter then gave another example by describing how the Arts Sector:

made their existence viable in the last three years by arguing the multiplier effect of the arts, and that this was a very simple economic tool that we have never really applied to the welfare sector.

Connie Benn and Jean McCaughey both agreed that there had been a number of good studies indicating that "if the poor had money they spend it" and that this was good for the economy, but that nobody took notice of such studies.

Jan Carter then argued that "the first thing is to get the studies done by the right people." Connie commented that these studies "offend the work ethic" and somebody else said that they "offend the economic orthodoxy."

David Scott agreed with these comments but argued that you can take these realities into account and then do what the conservation movement does which is "to plan it out."

Jean McCaughey suggested that a difference between what the conservation movement is able to do and what the welfare sector is trying to do is that "everyone can see trees and lakes, but in this society the poor and the homeless are invisible. People don't really believe they exist."

This led on to a discussion of representation of people on low incomes in the media, and how in ARC the media say "produce a poor family", and they don't want to be used in that way, and social workers and other staff don't want to be used.

Henderson Poverty Inquiry

The Henderson Poverty Inquiry was then brought up as an example of where "rational analysis" wasn't enough, because there wasn't enough "political muscle" to back it up. Peter Hollingworth argued that the welfare sector hadn't fought for the recommendations of the Poverty Inquiry because in the latter part of the 70s because Government policies reduced the resources of the sector, so the energies of the smaller organisations were "tied up with the business of daily survival and trying to maintain their grants".

David Scott argued that, on the contrary, organisations who said "that they are not getting money and therefore can't speak up" were using this as an excuse, and that he didn't know of many organisations "that had actually been cut off." Peter responded that organisations had been "cut back."

Bunk ups

David Green came in with a spirited defense of the Family Centre Project (following Don Edgar's criticisms), saying that:

the project did start with a very substantive commitment to poor people and to employment, housing and education, and that some of the things that were said during the day indicated that somehow, particularly down the line, that it didn't happen.

I have a mental image of a lot of the family services that the Brotherhood has run as being a bunk-up to getting onto something else; to get onto a horse called a TAFE college or a training or education or a job. What happened was that poor families were bunked up but the horse was not there, it was in the next paddock. But the family service had to remain to give the bunk-up. The problem is when the bunk-up doesn't connect to the right horse.

David went on to say that:

if the Brotherhood was to commit for every dollar that was committed to the bunk-up, another dollar to the connection with the mainstream, I think it would make a really significant difference. It could lead to some very innovative and creative tensions.

I think we have seen ten to fifteen years now of major programs which were directed at making schools accessible, of changing the nature of the labour market and access to it, and there are still people who miss

out. The reason people here can say they are poor is because they still are poor, and they are still missing out on those major services.

There is a legitimacy for bunk-ups, and there is a late eighties bunk-up. If the Brotherhood has to put its second dollar into the Fitzroy primary school to support a kid staying at school, or to be clothed properly to be okay at school, someone still has to put the second dollar after the bunk-up dollar in tutoring for those kids who are still dropping out of school at secondary school level. Or if it has to put the second dollar after the bunk-up into some back-up training for people who are in the work force, or as several people have said today, after they have been to a Brotherhood service, and in a sense have moved on out of it, and there was no support. Okay it is a linkwork support, that notion that when they have gone to work it is as if everything stopped.

There is a legitimacy in bunk-ups and there is legitimacy in matching dollar for dollar in providing access into those mainstream opportunities.

Notwithstanding all that has happened over the last fifteen years, we have enormous difficulties still creating the habitat which is a caring supportive habitat. I think there is still a very important role for non-government services. It is that second dollar.

Don Edgar

I thought I was saying you need the bunk-up. I wasn't trying to put services down. In fact my comment to Peter was that one of the things that you should perhaps be doing is filling the gaps in those services.

Don went on to argue:

that what is needed in family services to eliminate poverty is proper access. The reason I mentioned the adult education review, and what we recommended in that, is precisely that there are not sufficient access points. We have training programs but there is no access for a woman who has been out of the work force for years and years. You need more accessible points, through neighbourhood houses, or approved informal courses, or structures, and so on.

I was putting down the narrow focus and failure to link it with the horse that should have come along. That was the problem. The Brotherhood perhaps can provide some of

those horses. They should be active not only with family services but they should be active to make sure the education system is more responsive, that the political system is more responsive, that employers are more responsive, that training opportunities are linked into the education system. Because I don't think families sit alone. You have to tie them into services.

If the Brotherhood can do some sort of project in the Fitzroy area or whatever which filled those gaps and demonstrated to government that the problem is not with the services, but rather that people are falling between the cracks. As Jean said many of them don't know the services are there, because the welfare workers are so concentrated on casework and one to one activities. Instead they should get up and out, a day or so a week and be really politically active and generate links between different agencies, schools, doctors and welfare centres, and so on.

Now the integration has never really been demonstrated. A small project like the Family Centre Project won't ever demonstrate it while a larger project that looks at the linking of services and facilities and other institutional frameworks may well do it.

Concluding statement - Peter Hollingworth

Peter concluded the days proceedings by saying that he thought that one of the critical issues was how you linked the macro to the micro:

What should you be doing with families at the local level and how you devise programs... which are going to improve access to services, improve their capacity to manage their own lives ... and at the same time achieve systemic change.

On an optimistic note he made the comment that he thought the BSL was in a very important position, and that he thought "we can get the resources to do whatever needs to be done". He thanked everyone for contributing:

It has been a very important learning experience for everyone of us, positively and negatively, and it musn't be lost. We must be able to maximise some of those lessons in the planning for the future. We are not about to pack up the grand vision, we are not going to give up innovations, but it is just a hell of a lot harder than it was in those hakyon days of the 1970s.

APPENDIX

BACKGROUND PAPER - FAMILY CENTRE PROJECT SEMINAR

Tim Gilley & Jan Carter

This paper was provided to participants prior to the seminar day.

Seminar in brief

- (1) to focus on lessons learned from the Family Centre Project;
- (2) to assist the BSL in planning its future provision of services to families on low incomes;
- (3) to discuss the type of criteria which should inform the development of family support services, particularly the relevance of criteria of equity, effectiveness, and efficiency. What kind of services should the BSL be offering to families on low incomes in 1987? What is the most useful contribution that the BSL as a medium size volunteer agency can provide - in contrast to what is provided by local government, state and federal governments, or say, the self-help movement;
- (4) to relate the above to the policy environment of the late 80s.

Background

Review of BSL's family services

The BSL is at present reviewing what services it should be offering to families. As you are probably aware, the present focus of BSL service provision is for elderly persons, with very limited family service provision being offered through Limurru Centre in Fitzroy. The present review of services is being considered from two aspects: a review of services offered in Limurru (see attached report from the Co-ordinator) and whether the BSL should be providing additional services to families.

Family Centre Project research proposal

The BSL has developed a proposal to do a follow-up research study with the original Family Centre Project members. The aim of this study is to obtain a retrospective consumer view of the Family Centre Project, and to use this view to shed light on some key issues facing welfare services (especially family services) and welfare practitioners today.

Family support policy environment

Whilst income support for low income families is currently on the political agenda via the Family Assistance Package, service support for low income families is not. In fact threats to social expenditure provide an adverse climate for the maintenance, let alone the development of family support services. In Victoria, the theoretical links between services for low income families and the social justice strategy are apparent. Today's seminar will not be a "policy down", but an attempt to rethink from "practice-up".

Rationale for seminar

Key concepts of the Family Centre Project have continued to be influential in the BSL's provision of services, including projects such as SPAN, the Sharing Centre, the Northcote Accommodation Project, and in provision of services to families. It is therefore most appropriate for the BSL to focus on the lessons of the Family Centre Project as one method of reviewing what family services it wants to provide. It was also felt that there were a number of key individuals who had left the BSL and ARC who had important perspectives to offer the organisation, and that the seminar would provide an opportunity to have the benefit of these views. This was seen as particularly important given that two of the three directorships (Social Policy and Research Centre, and Community Services) are occupied by new members.

Aim of the seminar

- . To consolidate thinking about the Family Centre Project, so that its retrospective lessons might be absorbed and disseminated.
- . To assist the BSL to integrate the lessons from the Family Centre Project into its decision making on future service directions.
- . To establish new directions and notions for the provision of family support programs. To decide whether/how to challenge the policy environment affecting low income families.

What are the relevant issues today from the Family Centre Project?

The difficulty here is of course that it is not only a matter of understanding the lessons from the Family Centre Project, but of re-interpreting these in the light of the changes in the past 12 years since the Family Centre Project. The outline which follows is an attempt to remind participants of the conference of the key principles of the Family Centre Project.

Empowerment/Development model

The main goal of the Family Centre Project was described early on as being about:

The empowerment of poor families, through the redistribution of resources and power in the community by attempting to demonstrate with a small group of families that changes in their economic and social conditions were a precondition to changes in their family and societal relationships. (FCP, First Report 1972)

Four powers were identified and these were: power over relationships, decision making, resources, and information.

Later in the project the core concept became the developmental model whose underlying assumption was "that society's institutions should be changed in order to reduce inequalities and distribute resources more evenly". This approach was contrasted with the remedial approach which assumes that the "individual must be changed so that he fits more readily into society's institutions" and the preventative approach which assumes that the "particular individual's environment must be changed to enable him to fit more readily into society's institutions". (FCP, Third progress Report) The major components of the developmental model are still major practical issues in the development and delivery of services today. These are discussed below under the following headings: consumer participation, social action, self-help, transfer of resources, and deprofessionalisation.

Questions

- . Is this division of services into a remedial, preventative and developmental approach still a useful way of thinking about the sort of services we provide to families?
- . Should we be concentrating on the economic and political rights of our service users, in order that they gain the skills and confidence to be able to fight for social justice for themselves in an unjust world?
- . Or is this all a pipe-dream with little relevance to the issues of poverty amongst families in the 80s?
- . Should we, instead, be concentrating on programs that concentrate on internal family dynamics and try to improve family relationships, particularly given that the "technology" of such, in so far as they apply to low income groups, have developed considerably since the early 70s.

Consumer Participation was seen as being about providing the "opportunities for families to learn the process of decision making and change through a participatory activities program" (FCP, Second Progress Report 1973).

Questions

- . Can consumer participation in a service lead to empowerment in the terms that the FCP defined it?
- . Can participation in what is a small specialised community have any bearing on one's ability to deal with the larger forces and institutions that exist in the society, or does participation simply leave people unprepared to deal with the wider world?
- . What levels of participation should we be offering to families who use our services? For example:
 - the right to have a complaint fairly dealt with?
 - the right to be consulted on any issues affecting the services they use?
 - the right to vote on issues affecting the services provided?
 - the right to control a service along with other service users?
 - the right to eventual employment in that service?
- . In a time of tight social spending, what level of resourcing is justified in maintaining participation in a service?
- . Is there a model of participation which is ideal for persons using a family service?

Social action was enshrined in one of the original aims of the project:

To promote social change in both public attitudes and existing social provisions which are often unsympathetic to poor people because they fail to conform to middle class behavioural norms (FCP, First Report 1972).

Question

- . What forms of social action are desirable?
- . What level of resourcing is justified in comparison with direct service provision, for example?

- If social action by consumers is desirable, who should identify the issues to be fought?
- Should it be paid workers, service users, a combination of both or should it be left to others?

Self-help was seen as an "action" or "self-help" orientation where the families themselves would take initiative aimed at improving their basic circumstances". (FCP - First Report 1972)

Question

- . Is self-help so crucial to family services that its components should always be a centre piece of BSL services. Specifically, what place does self-help in groups have in enhancing the capacity of families to survive and then to do better?

Transfer of resources was seen originally as power over resources in terms of providing a secure minimum income, and then more broadly as the "re-distribution of power and resources". It was believed that although money alone could not solve the problems of poor families, the provision of a secure minimum income was necessary in order for the families to have the capacity to make positive changes in their lives. The conclusions of a Canadian study were quoted in the first report of the Family Centre Project as follows:

Casework in the context of poverty starts with an almost insurmountable disadvantage. There is growing evidence that services without a basic level of income wastes the efforts of the helpers.

Transfer of skills can be seen as part of the transfer of resources.

Questions

- . What does transfer of resources mean?
- . Is it equitable?
- . Does transfer of resources for some mean a zero sum game for others?
- . Does transfer of resources that emphasise the political and economic rights of low income families, mean that other kinds of service for families - for example, developmental services for children - are starved for resources?

- . Was the implied assumption of the FCP - that their project would lead to low income families being able to demand and get (through social action) a bigger slice of the national cake - justified, or was the size of the slice determined by broader social and political forces?
- . More specifically, is the provision of services to families with inadequate incomes basically a waste of time and money?
- . If not, what kind of skills can be usefully transferred to people within a family service program?

For example, should professionals be trying to teach people their own professional skills, or should a service be concentrating on more simple living skills (for example, getting a driving licence, learning to read and write and so on).

Deprofessionalisation Was seen as a shift from a "remedial or preventative model" in which professionals were accountable to "colleagues and techniques" to a developmental model in which the "professionals were accountable to consumers" (FCP - Third progress report 1974). Professional values and standards were seen to include the following:

that each profession must be distinct and have its own exclusive body of knowledge, that professions are arranged in a status hierarchy, that the professions and not the consumer has the right to set its own rules for practice.

In FCP literature the point was made that the concept of deprofessionalisation did accept that professionals had useful skills and was not anti-professional. However, it "did deny that particular skills were the exclusive property of a professional and that some skills were more valuable than others".

The two main deprofessionalisation strategies used were to attempt to change relationships amongst staff, and also to change the relationship between staff and families. The processes used:

... blurred professional boundaries by removing discriminatory practices in tasks and conditions of work, recognised the knowledge of the families, transferred decision making power and authority, acknowledged the lack of theory on which to operate, and changed the structure of the organisation (FCP - Fourth Progress Report 1974).

Question

- . How can we best use the skills of different professional groups to provide the best services for families?
- . Is the FCP approach of deprofessionalisation really distinguishable from anti-professionalism?