"Who Cares ?" ................"Community Child Care."  

Two handbooks published in April this year herald in the turning point in the provision of family support services.

"Who Cares ? Family Problems, community Links and other Helping Services" has been written by Jean Mc Caughhey, Sheila Shaver, Helen Ferber and others. (published by Sun Books for the Institute of Applied Economics and Social Research, University of Melbourne)

"Community Child Care Manual " has been written by Winson Mc Caughhey, Patricia Sebastian and others (Published by Greenhouse Publications for Community Child Care, 67 Brunswick St Reet Fitzroy)

The direct connection between these two publications was given spontaneous recognition. This fact has been shown by the number of letters published in the Age during the first weeks of April. 

letters from Jean Miller (Community Child Care), Jan Cropley (Noble Park), Maureen LeBehe (St. ilds), Elizabeth Edwards (Sumach), Margaret Pickering (Deer Park), Ann Morrow (Malvern) All of thee letters commended the "Who Cares ?" report on its emphasis on the need for a network of family support services.

A leaflet "Who Cares ? We Care" distributed by June Ryan (Peck's Road Sydenham) and signed by about thirty people (contact point and people for Neighbourhood Centres) very extensively embraced the findings of the "Who Cares ?" report and called for the assistance for children's centres which provide "Homely, loving care in a local house, Support to parents in emergencies. A happy joyful atmosphere that teaches children how to socialise at an early age."

Both "Community Child Care" and "Who Cares ?" quote the world famous, Margaret Mead who recently said... "We now expect the family to achieve alone what no other society ever expected an individual family to accomplish unaided. In effect, we call upon the individual family to do what the whole clan used to do."

Community Child Care gives pride of place to its definition of the word "community" stating....

"The word community has a thousand meaning and references. In the manual the term 'community' refers to that process of interaction between people. Knowing and being known, caring and being cared for, sharing, exchanging, trading and so on. The geographic context in which the process can occur more easily in the field of child care is that of the immediate neighbourhood and the municipality. Proximity and accessibility are essential because women with infants and toddlers frequently do not have transport and must walk. Older children also depend on their two feet to get around."
"Who Cares?" goes beyond trying to find the answer of the problem of how services can reach the people, by asking the further question of how can the services integrate the people into the community and encourage them to participate fully and freely in its life?

In seeking the answer to this the "Who Cares?" team searched for ways in which personal supports can be encouraged and gave the example of the Community Child Care movement as a prototype for this type of self-help relationship, stating: "The Community Child Care movement is an example of such self-help groups. This movement encourages the acquisition and development of neighbourhood houses in which small groups of parents in a local area come together to run a service and to share the responsibility for maintaining it and for the care of their children." The report quotes from Community Child Care the following description of a Neighbourhood Centre:

"Through communicating, working collectively and becoming a 'community' they can establish the services and make those informal, reciprocal arrangements which, while meeting each family's child care needs, also give people a sense of belonging, and a group on which they can depend." Note the definition of 'community' as quoted above; it is important to underline that creating community is a process...... an on-going dynamic relationship, not a fixed and permanently determined relationship, thus its very nature allows for reciprocity.

Over and over again in the pages of "Who Cares?" it is evident that people need others, outside their immediate nuclear family, who really care about them and are involved personally in their lives. The study showed that some families are well able to create such networks, but others are not. Over these networks are affected by broad economic and social structures of the community. A inadequate income, insecure housing tenure, cheap housing, fluctuating employment opportunities for unskilled workers which sometimes enforce a high degree of mobility on low income families, are listed as conditions which make the development of networks less possible. The report also states that some of the critical conditions in which this challenge is made are:

F. Lack of income often coincides with some other disability. Need for a guaranteed minimum income scheme for all (see Poverty Report by Prof. Henderson).

"Who Cares?" Professor Ronald Henderson's personal view. The Summary of his epitaph is entitled "Epilogue" (pages 274-279 of Mr "Who Cares?")....
Doctors are often the first and sometimes the main source of information of families in need of support. Need to streamline referrals through social workers at group practice or community health centres and municipal social workers, all of which need to be aware of informal care-taker network. Someone with a "roving commission" who is accessible by phone and willing to take trouble to supply and obtain assistance is essential in such a scheme.

Citizens Advice Centres, usually associated with municipal social workers, have made significant contribution to community aid services. Need for C.A.B.s to be more acceptable, comprehensive and effective.

There is a distrust of State Social Welfare Department. Need for regional offices of the Dept to develop preventive role.

The mobility of social work staff is a constant problem. Need for helpers who "stay put". A middle-aged woman with an established home and ties in the local community could prove more approachable and effective than a young social worker with few local ties.

There is a grave danger that old people and passive welfare clients are reduced to the role of recipients only. Need to find ways for many more people from all sections of the community to be able to contribute voluntary service. Suggestion that retirement Commonwealth Social Security could notify municipal social work department of people who are on retirement etc.

There are serious deficiencies in regular community services. Need for a shift of emphasis so that schools, hospitals and rehabilitation centres and so on regard the relationships between the service and the community as of equal importance to its specialised function.

Statutory services were least disliked when they were made available at the municipal level. Need for services to be localised. This also provides better opportunities for co-operation between care-taking individuals, voluntary organisations, and local welfare services.

Vouard Committee of Inquiry into local Government in Victoria in 1972 concluded that local councils are playing a more and more important part in welfare services. Need to encourage discussion and formulate financial relationships between different levels of government. Especially the question of welfare spending.

There is a general assumption that those at high level planning know what "we should do to help them" on the assumption that "we know what they need". The research has shown that there is a great deal to be learnt about what people need and want and how best to meet these needs and wants.