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October / November 1991

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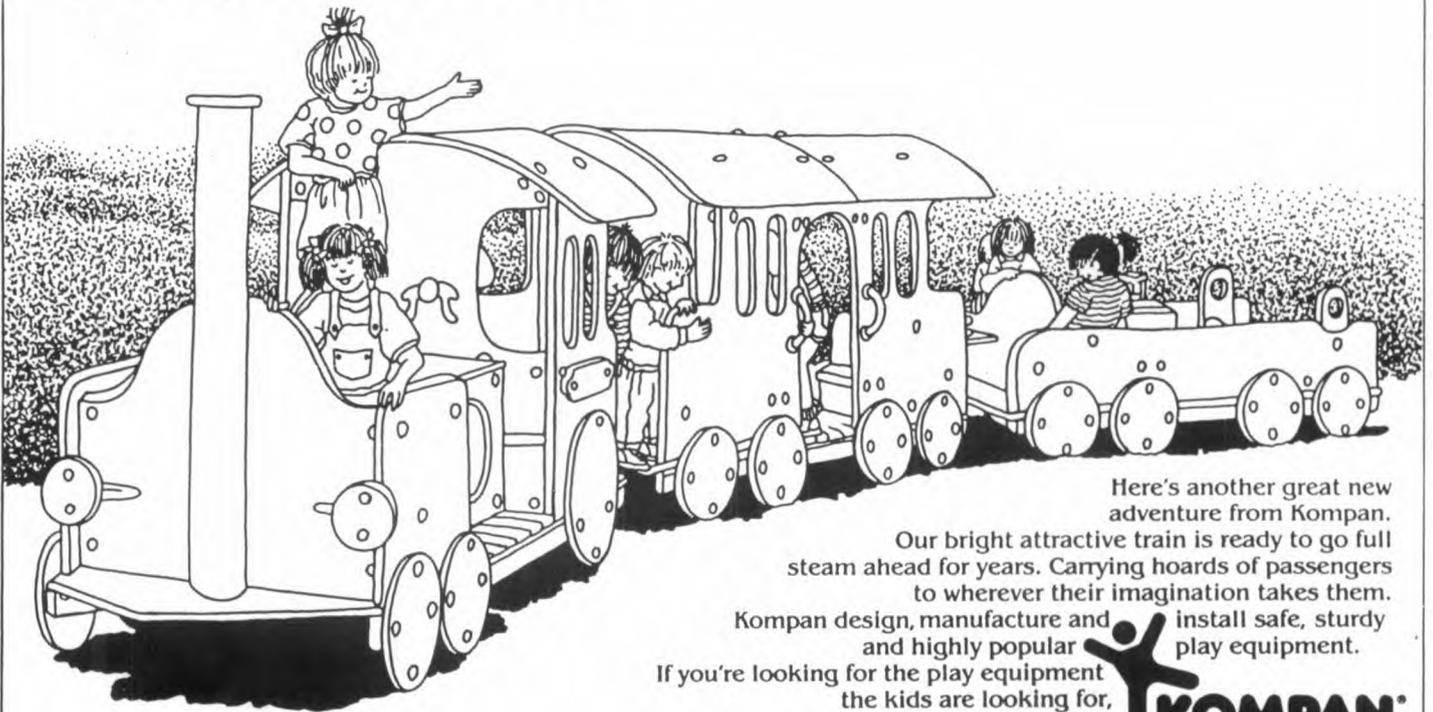
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Scottish Child

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Scottish Child

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Oliver Brookes

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As Britain leads the world in
banning pictures of new-born
babies, we ask - what's the right
way to sell jumpers? Plus
problems over names, problems
over money and a creche in a
shopping centre - no problem!

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Easterhouse, and asks do we
really understand the value of
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Looking to the Future

This is SCOTTISH CHILD's third birthday issue, and we're giving you a supplement of new writing to celebrate. Now you may think it's a bit odd that a three-year old is giving away presents instead of getting them on its birthday, but don't worry - we're launching a £10,000 birthday appeal that gives you the chance to give us a nice, big present in return. We need that sort of money to keep SCOTTISH CHILD going as an independent voice on children and childhood in Scotland. And there's probably never been a more important time for such a voice to be there, shouting loudly and getting heard.

●

Britain provides less publicly-funded childcare than almost any other country in Europe. France and Belgium provide publicly-funded day nurseries and child-minders for 20% of under-threes - in Britain the figure is under 2%, less than one child in fifty. In Denmark, a country with about the same population as Scotland, nearly half of the children under three have childcare provided.

It doesn't get much better when you look at three and four year olds. By this age France and Belgium are providing over 90% of children with nursery places, usually full-time. In Scotland it's under a third, and most of those places are part-time.

These statistics come from a recent report on 'Childcare in a Modern Welfare System' from the Institute for Public Policy Studies. The report points out just how backward this country is in its provision of childcare compared with other countries - and shows the advantages, to everyone, of providing flexible, responsive childcare to all children whose parents want it.

The report points out that up to half of the children under five who are currently living in poverty in Britain could be brought out of poverty if childcare enabled their parents to work. It also points out that children who have pre-school nursery experience do better at school, are more likely to get jobs and are less likely to get into trouble with the law. Girls are less likely to become teenage mothers and more likely to have jobs.

Expanding childcare facilities would not only make sense socially - the government would actually make money out of it, with less benefit being paid out and more tax being brought in. The more childcare places, the higher the rate of return. Fund childcare, not poverty, that's the message - and it's one that other countries seem to have got a lot quicker than us.

So how come Britain lags behind so dramatically in the provision of childcare? Well, there are a lot of powerful people around who simply think it's wrong for mothers to go out and work. They think that the rise in the number of lone parents has led to increased lawlessness. They think that there is one way of bringing up children that is best - their way - and all the other ways are substitutes that don't quite match up. It's a view that was displayed at its most ridiculous in the anti-gay clause 28's idea of a 'pretended family relationship' - there are 'real' families and then there's all the rest of us.

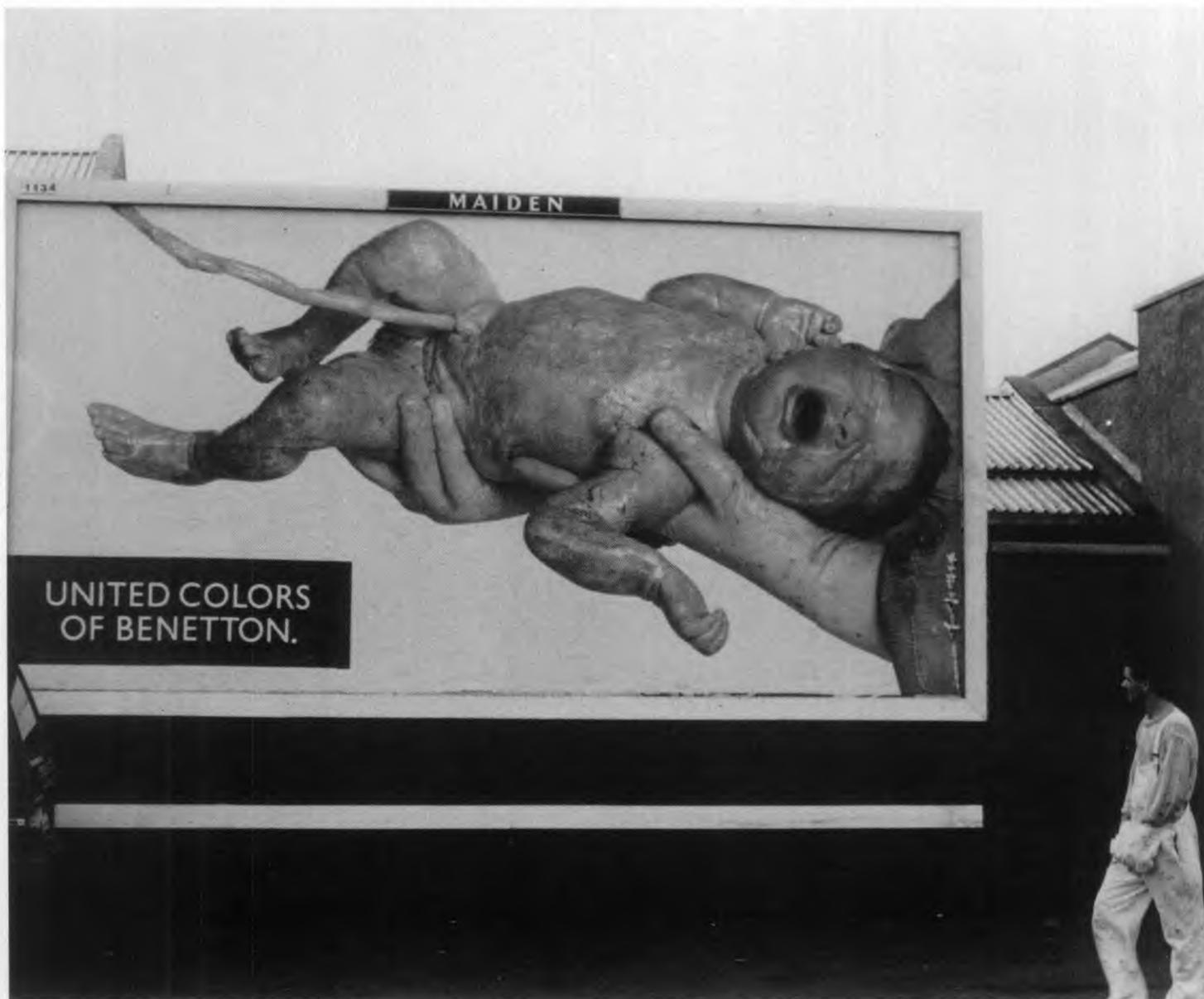
We don't have to go along with this backward-looking way of seeing things. We can welcome diversity, seeing it as quite an exciting thing that children are brought up in different ways. We can offer support to those adults and parents bringing up children on their own when they need it, instead of cutting nursery places because we 'can't afford' to keep them open. We can blame those politicians whose policies have made this country's childcare provision a joke instead of blaming the parents and children who have to try and cope with the results of these politicians' policies.

●

Which brings us back to where we started really - there probably never has been a time when a magazine like SCOTTISH CHILD was more necessary. Times are changing. Having a voice around that won't let children get dumped at the bottom of political agendas will help ensure that, for our children, times are changing for the better. ■

Colin Chalmers

Magic Moments - Banned!



ADVERTISING

Can there be any excuse for the hypocritical reaction of the great British jumper-buying public to the now notorious advert of a baby, still bloody from the womb, which appeared up and down our high streets in early September?

Appeared - and disappeared. For within a few days of the 15 foot high billboards appearing they were away, effectively banned by the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA).

Eight hundred people complained to the ASA about the advert within a few days of it appearing. To put this into context, the ASA normally receive about 10,000 complaints a year - that's about 200 a week. So a lot of people were upset

about this advert. Their complaints fell into three very distinct categories.

There were those who quite simply thought the image was distasteful - they were shocked by it and did not want to have it shoved, unasked for, into the back of their retinas. It is tempting to think that these indignant complainers are the same people who gurgle and coo over the images of cute babies, with curvaceous pink limbs, which are used to sell everything from soap to tea bags. While these cutesy images are grossly exaggerated and romanticised, Benetton's picture of a new-born baby is at least true. Hardly, one might think, a reason to ban it.

Then there were those parents of children who were distressed by the advert. According to Caroline

Crawford at the ASA, "The vast majority of small children thought it was a dead baby". While this may very well be the initial response of some children, parents should surely be able to explain the significance and joy of the moment pictured. Indeed perhaps some do, explaining the large number of letters to Benetton from parents requesting a copy of the advert for their children.

Finally, there were the complainers who had nothing against the image per se but who objected to it being used to sell jumpers. They felt that their attention had been grabbed by this very graphic picture which had no relevance to the product being advertised. I must admit to feeling this way myself - but why should I complain about this image when I have failed to complain about the use of all sorts

of other eye-catching images to sell completely unrelated products?

What of the company itself? Clearly the whole 'United Colours of Benetton' campaign is not really about universal love - it's about flogging consumer goods. But Benetton must be congratulated for one thing. All the hysteria, the hypocrisy, the shouts of foul which have surrounded the advert are symptomatic of the fact that we, collectively, have lost touch with our humanity. Birth, like illness and old age, is something which we conveniently confine to the hospital. Whatever its imperfections, Benetton's advert does, in some way, celebrate this most important of moments in all our lives. ■

Thom Dibdin

Turning Support into Cash

APPEAL

It isn't an unusual conversation. I'm sitting in a community centre in a Glasgow housing scheme talking to a youth worker who is reading SCOTTISH CHILD. He likes the magazine and thinks it's saying some things that really need saying. He thinks it's very professional.

"And of course," I say, "we don't get any funding. We only keep going because people buy the magazine and support it". I thought he heard me, but maybe he was engrossed in the copy I'd brought along. "Yeah," he says, "it's great to get a magazine that, you know, talks about important things. It looks good too. So who funds you anyway?"

"No one."

"Eh?"

SCOTTISH CHILD has got a serious problem. Because we make sure that the magazine you're reading now, our other publications and our events are of a high quality, lots of people assume we have pots of money. Unfortunately, it's just not true.

That's why SCOTTISH CHILD is celebrating its third birthday by launching a £10,000 appeal. It's money that is urgently needed for SCOTTISH CHILD to continue publishing and to grow.

In the three years since SCOTTISH CHILD established itself as a bi-monthly magazine it has become widely recognised as a unique, and necessary, independent voice about children and childhood in Scotland. Out of the magazine have grown a number of related projects - we produced Scotland's first national report on teenage homelessness; we published the first major book from inside the Scottish prison system about how it needs to change; and we have organised major events, bringing together hundreds of people, that are characterised by their openness, lack of jargon and accessibility to people of all incomes.

But for all this activity, SCOTTISH CHILD receives NO grants and NO funding of any kind - public or private. We are only able to produce the magazine, the literary

supplements, books, reports and so on because of our readers' support - and because many people are willing to work for very little, often nothing, to do this. We will only be able to continue doing these things if we can turn more of our readers' support into hard cash.

We know that many people value SCOTTISH CHILD's ability to publish views, opinions and new ideas that aren't determined by a need to please advertisers or a fear of offending some big organisation that pulls the financial strings. Our expanding readership reflects this. But in order to continue to provide the independent voice that SCOTTISH CHILD is now seen as, we are having to turn to the people who we know recognise the importance of that independence - our readers.

Our third birthday appeal is being launched because increased costs across the board - printing, postage and so on - mean that we will not be able to continue publishing SCOTTISH CHILD without a significant input of cash. We know that many people want to see SCOTTISH CHILD continue to prosper well beyond its third birthday - the appeal is giving people a chance to play a part in seeing that happen.

One of the main ways in which you can support the appeal is by becoming a FRIEND OF SCOTTISH CHILD (see back cover). As a FRIEND OF SCOTTISH CHILD you will receive a free subscription plus all other SCOTTISH CHILD publications for a year; you will be invited to all SCOTTISH CHILD events and workshops; and you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you are helping the magazine survive and grow.

Already, a number of social events are being planned to help us reach the £10,000 figure as soon as possible. A launch of this issue's NEW VOICES, NEW WRITING supplement is being held in the Tron Theatre Bar in Glasgow on 11th October where a range of writers and musicians will be appearing. Other events are in the pipeline - look out for details.

As with all SCOTTISH CHILD's



Colin Chalmers

endeavours up till now, the appeal will depend on the commitment of our readers and supporters for its success. And that's a pretty sound basis to be working on. As one reader put it recently, "We're meant to have a free press in this country, but so much of what you read is just about selling you things. SCOTTISH CHILD is more than that. There's always articles about what it's like for

ordinary people just getting on with life, bringing up kids, lots of stuff that's important. I just think it's so valuable to have a magazine like that."

If you want more information, or have any fund raising ideas, phone us on 031-220 6502. ■

Colin Chalmers

A Bad Business



ADOPTION

Last month a major international conference on adoption took a long, hard look at 'inter-country adoption' - the growing international trade in babies. The conference, organised by British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering and others, took place in Edinburgh and brought together researchers, adoption workers, birth parents, adopters and adoptees from all over the world. One whole day out of the conference's three days examined the moral, political and practical issues involved in this expanding business - for that, very clearly, is what it is.

Damien Ngabonziza, the secretary general of the International Social Services in Geneva, spoke to the conference about this thriving trade in supplying children for the

adoption 'market' in the west. He challenged the myth, happily encouraged by those who make a great deal of money by trading in the international baby market, that these children are always abandoned. In fact, the international baby trade often involves kidnapping - and always involves the exploitation of poor families in poor countries.

The baby trade has grown out of, and lives off, the harsh reality of appalling poverty facing many countries throughout the world. There is a market, and people will supply it. Quite simply, rich people from rich countries are buying the babies of poor people from poor countries - notably South American countries such as Peru and El Salvador (handy for the US) and more recently from Romania.

One delegate at the confer-

ence Angela Dumetrescu, a child protection worker from Romania, made a plea for an end to this international trade in children. "In Romania", she told the conference, "we have many, many good families who want to adopt. We have families who are infertile. But most of the healthy babies have been adopted by other countries".

"If we cannot find families in Romania then we are very open to collaboration with other countries. If children are adopted abroad, then we want collaboration with that country, we want proper reports and we want to know that that adoption is in the child's interest. We want to take the children back if the adoption is not in the child's interest.

"But most importantly, we want to be able to care for our children in our own country.

We want our children to grow up in their own customs and traditions and to live with their own families wherever that is possible.

"Money does not solve all the problems. Families who are poor can give their children special things."

As someone else at the conference put it, the solution to the suffering of millions of children throughout the world is not the inter-country adoption of small numbers of children outwith their own countries and cultures. What is needed is large scale support for these countries' own internal family support services - and that may mean a pretty fundamental look at the growing divide in the world between rich and poor. ■

Sally Wassell

SHOPPING

The shoppers' creche in Ayr is almost too good to be true - a District Council service that is appreciated by all who use it, gives parents a welcome break and allows children to mix and learn at the same time.

The creche opened in June 1990, and in its first year had 20,000 visits, with many children registering as regular visitors. It is staffed by trained nursery nurses and volunteer assistants and caterers for all ages from 18 months to 12 years. The creche is obviously useful to parents - who get the chance to shop knowing that their children are being well cared for - and the children seem to love it too.

Susan and Ken Lorimer have been bringing their two daughters - Sarah, 8 and Cathy, 6 - to the creche since it opened. Susan says that "It's a trip in its own right for the girls, they want to come in and

play. They just don't like shopping, they detest being dragged around the shops."

Creche organisers are proud that the service is seen by parents as something positive for the kids and not just a dumping ground. Many of the parents who use the creche see it as a chance for their children to play and socialise with other children, getting used to mixing with others and making the transition to school that much easier.

The way the children share the equipment is good social training. As Susan says, "The staff are very good and the co-operation is interesting with the children taking turns if they can't do the activity they want."

Most children understand the system. According to creche manager Gill Wade, "We sometimes have to teach them that, but that learning is part of the reason why the parents want their children to come here in the first place."

Come in and Play!

The activities on offer are on a theme basis similar to a nursery school, and the children all have their own favourites. Some will not go home until they have painted a picture to take with them. The computer is popular with the older ones and everyone likes the soft slide.

Michael Butler, who's 3, is keen on the painting and the train set. His mother is delighted with the creche too - "There is a lot more on offer than at some nurseries. Just look round at the kids now, there isn't one not enjoying themselves".

Clare, 7, comes every few weeks and looks forward to every visit. "I like the bouncy shute. I climb up with the rope and I slide down. Sometimes I pull the rope up and don't let my little sister up."

Local shopkeepers are in favour of the scheme too, seeing it as an incentive for people to visit the town centre more often. Because

it makes shopping more pleasant they also think there is a chance of better sales.

There is, however, some resistance to the creche's work from the Conservative opposition on Kyle and Carrick Council who fund the operation. They have dubbed it "The most expensive baby-sitting service in Western Europe", they claim that each child attending the creche is subsidised to the tune of £8.50. This is a disputed figure, but Gill Wade believes that this sort of expenditure on childcare is justified: "It all depends how you look at it, but I can tell you this - everyone, adult or child, who used the creche today will say yes, it's worth every penny."

Stephen Naysmith

NAMES

When my friend told her Auntie Ruby that she was keeping her own name after marriage, the result was explosive.

"To me," announced Auntie Ruby, "you will always be Mrs David Smithson."

"And to me," replied my friend fearlessly, "you will always be Ratface."

Reactions to my own decision to keep my name after getting married were certainly perplexed. Ten years on, little has changed. Friends and family humour me, but still find it difficult to introduce us to people or address letters to us both. I have been accused of insulting my husband (it was, in fact, a joint decision) and of deliberately giving the impression that I am 'available' to other men (in spite of the fact that I wear a wedding ring). While calling

It's Not Easy Being Yourself

myself 'Ms' can still be guaranteed to evoke the same 'embittered spinster / women's libber' response from certain quarters, hostility can also come from unexpected ones. The Auntie Ruby school of thought is not uncommon, even among younger women.

All this, you may think, has little importance in the face of more pressing social matters, and of course I agree. However, I have never been able to understand why a simple - and perfectly legal - personal decision should elicit such a strong response from others. All I know is, if I receive a letter addressed to me in my husband's name, I feel stripped of my own personality. I was Kim Bishop before and when I met him, and it seemed reasonable to remain so after we married.

With the imminent arrival of our first child, all this is coming to a head again. While ante-natal paperwork is not especially geared

to making an issue out of parents' names, I have still been called upon to explain myself to politely baffled midwives and health visitors. We have to see what sort of confusion arises when our baby is finally born. Certain people, meanwhile, can barely keep the smirk from their faces at the anticipated complications, and there have been dark mutterings about the 'stigma' of parents with different names.

Of course we don't want to make life harder for our children - so we've been considering the options. Option one, of course, is my husband's surname, which would probably result in me being called Mrs Wright by everyone. Option two would be to combine our surnames, which would mean that unless we hyphenated them - with all the unwelcome class connotations that implies - people would end up using whichever name came last. Hyphens are all very well until Baby Bishop-Wright grows up and falls in love with

Baby Smith-Brown and has a Baby Bishop-Wright-Smith-Brown who grows up...

This doesn't seem to be a problem in other countries. In Spain, I read recently, everyone takes both parents' names. The mother's name is then passed down the female line, the father's down the male line. I have spent the last twenty minutes or so drawing out a pretend family tree and I still don't understand. But in Spain, apparently, names are shed and taken on with nobody worrying about it - and nobody getting upset.

There is another solution - to adopt an entirely different name altogether, or a cunning combination of both. The possibilities are endless. I can see myself now, struggling round the supermarket with my unruly brood of Baby Bights... I wonder what Auntie Ruby would make of that?

Kim Bishop

University Of Dundee

SOCIAL WORK



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29th November - Lanark

Booking and enquiries:

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Scottish Child November Workshops

Child Sexual Abuse - Thursday 7 November

Child Punishment - Friday 15 November

Gender - Tuesday 26 November

The workshops will be held at the Scottish Child offices at 40 Shandwick Place, Edinburgh (5 minutes walk from Haymarket station). Each workshop costs £15, with some concessions available for £5. Workshops last from 10.00am - 3.30pm. Early booking advised.

Lunch, tea and coffee are included in the fee.

Please reserve me ___ place(s) at the child sexual abuse workshop.

Please reserve me ___ place(s) at the child punishment workshop.

Please reserve me ___ place(s) at the gender workshop.

I enclose a cheque/postal order for £___ made payable to **Scottish Child**.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

Please return to Scottish Child, 40 Shandwick Place, Edinburgh EH2 4RT.

CONNECTIONS

IN BRIEF

Anyone get **The Sun**? If you do, you'll know all about this democracy-loving paper's contribution to people's power - their 'You the Jury' phone-in polls. Recently they ran one on **HANGING** for child murderers, where **Sun** readers could phone up one of those 0898 numbers to register their personal disgust at child murder, getting a chance to show how much they care for children by demanding that those convicted of murdering them get killed themselves.

This, of course, is nothing to do with deterring future child murderers, protecting children or even re-thinking judicial policy. It is all to do with letting the great British **Sun**-reading public feel better, because they hate, really *hate*, those child-murdering 'nutters' and 'psychos' - and that's the same as loving children, isn't it? Some psychiatrists would call this sort of behaviour 'projection' - putting a bit of yourself that you are ashamed of, or feel uncomfortable with, somewhere else, then denouncing it - but the psychological term 'sick' is probably just as accurate.

Anyway, I'm sure you're all desperate to know the result. NO (don't hang 'em) 3,000; YES (let 'em swing) 177,600 - so no surprise there. Oh, and all the calls cost money, and all the money's going to charity - the Anne Diamond Cot Death Appeal, in fact.

For once, **Scottish Child** really is speechless.

"Young people are fed up with being told by grown-ups **WHAT TO DO** and **WHAT NOT TO DO**". No, not a quote from a **Scottish Child** editorial - it's from the opening lines of **Roald Dahl's Guide to RAILWAY SAFETY**. Like all of the late Roald Dahl's stories, this free booklet for children - published by British Rail - identifies with the kids' viewpoint against the bossy GIANTS (adults). Dahl justifies the DOs and DON'Ts that are part of this book only because "...if you ignore any one of them it could **COST YOU YOUR LIFE**". The booklet is full of good advice for kids - and adults - about how not to meet a sticky end on or near the railway line. And just to make sure we get the message, the consequences of ignoring the advice are

illustrated with gruesome glee by Quentin Blake.

True to form, Dahl siezes the opportunity to take a few pot-shots at the stupidity of the adult world and its fixation with the motor car. It's all good fun and far more likely to be read again and again by a child than the usual safety stuff. The booklet can be obtained free from your local railway station.

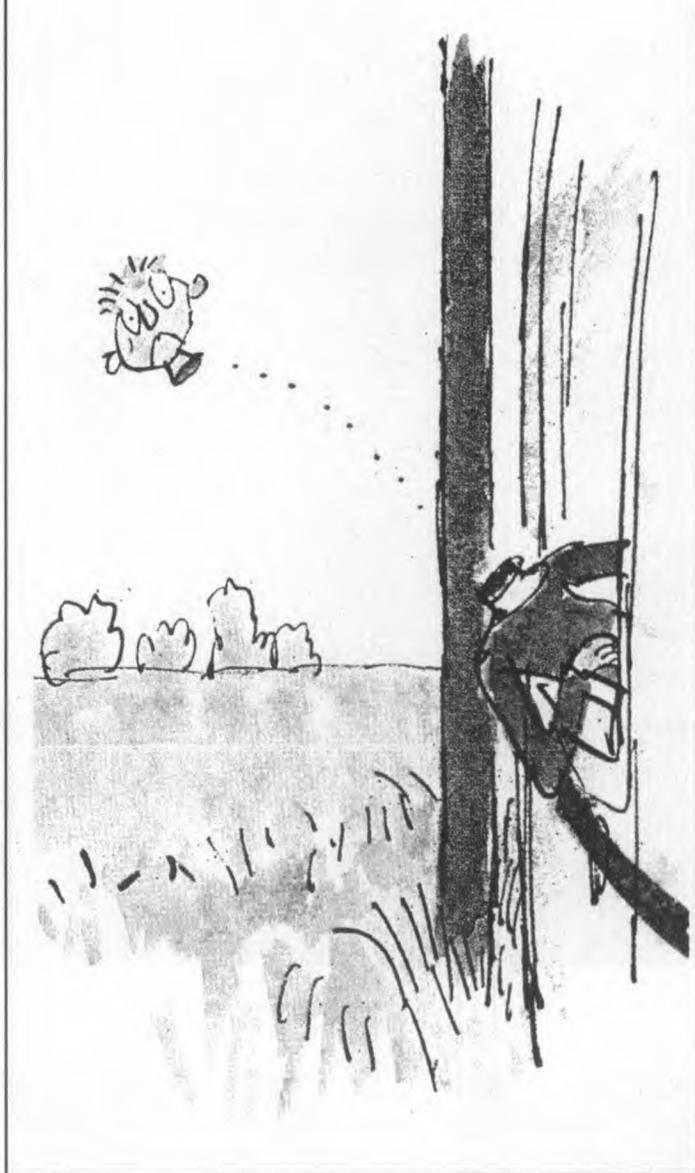
The **ACHAMORE CENTRE** for children with special needs in north west Glasgow is threatened with closure. The Centre's way of helping children is significantly different from a lot of other services for children with special needs. It offers a multi-disciplinary approach to helping children that starts from the needs of the child - successfully avoiding the professional demarcation disputes that anyone working with children will be all too aware of. Not only does the Centre treat the child as a whole person, it also helps children throughout their childhood, unlike most Centres which have a cut-off age of five. Altogether quite successful, you'd think - so why the threat of closure?

Well that's the point really - it's a bit too successful. I mean if you're going to start opening places up that are friendly, accessible and offer real help to people, before you know it there'll be lots of people wanting to use it. And if lots of people want to use it, it'll be awfully busy, and people might want more and more, and the cost...!

The Achamore Centre isn't shut yet - and there's a Parents' Group at the Centre that's determined it won't be. Their campaign to ensure that Glasgow Health Board keeps this innovative and successful Centre open has backing from a whole range of people who are involved with it - professionals, parents and children. If you want to find out more you can phone Helena McNulty, the secretary of the Achamore Parents' Group on 041-944 0436. We'll keep you posted...

Everyone who attended **Scottish Child's Tears and Protest Event** last April will be pleased to know that Kay Carmichael's book about **CRYING**, on which the event was partly based, has now been

NEVER NEVER NEVER STICK YOUR HEAD OUT OF THE WINDOW OF A MOVING TRAIN.



Quentin Blake

published. In **Ceremony of Innocence: Tears, Power and Protest** Kay Carmichael argues that we underestimate and trivialise the importance of tears in our lives - as a means of communication and as a source of energy and creativity.

The book takes a wide-ranging look at where crying fits into the scheme of things, and the different function tears play for children, men and women. Kay Carmichael points out the very real problems that have resulted from the way that tears and emotions are frowned on in our society, particularly for men.

Some of you may already have

seen some excerpts from the book that appeared last month in the **Glasgow Herald**. One of these pieces looked at the subtle and not-so-subtle ways in which men and boys are cut off from their feelings. The piece argued that we need to see emotions, feelings and tears as concerning us all, and not simply as the concern of women. Quite right. So it's probably just a sign of how far we have to go in taking such ideas seriously that the piece, entitled *Boys, Men and Tears*, appears on - the women's page.

Ceremony of Innocence: Tears, Power and Protest is published by **MacMillan**.



Colin Chalmers

PLAYING CH

The new Auchinlea Playground in Easterhouse must rank amongst the best in Scotland. The brightly coloured Kompan equipment, the imaginative landscaping and the safe bark surfaces combine to stimulate the most exciting childhood imaginings. It makes a change from the poorly maintained backcourts, grey tenement buildings and grassy areas with 'No Ball Games' restrictions that have been the 'play areas' for so many of us. With play equipment like that provided at Auchinlea, children will be able to dream the dreams that will help them transform the reality about them when they are adults.

Fantasies are an essential part of every child's

development. As adults too, we need our fantasies and imaginations if we are to create something different in our lives. Without imaginations, we become docile, apathetic, accepting of everything life throws at us.

In Easterhouse, as in many other peripheral housing schemes, today's parents grew up in an environment where outdoor play opportunities were very restricted. To talk about play opportunities and experiences with many parents is to talk of something which was outside their childhood experience. A reality of poor play facilities can sometimes be easily accepted by communities where adults have had few opportunities to envisage anything different.

So it's great that the Auchinlea Playground is now a wonderful reality for the children of Easterhouse, including my own. Hopefully it will inspire the sort of imaginative play I have seen my children enjoy elsewhere.

Like the time we visited the Liverpool Garden Festival site the year after the Garden Festival. The whole place had been transformed into a huge, safe, supervised play area. The massive indoor dome; the twenty foot high Pepsi-Cola-can-shute; the gigantic jumping castles; and the security of the brightly-clad young play workers who helped make that day so memorable for all of us. Liverpool may carry a tarnished image to many adults, but to my children, for one day



Colin Chalmers

Auchinlea Playground Easterhouse

ITY GAMES

in their lives, it was the place to be.

Or Kelvingrove Park, where there is, according to my sons, "The biggest shute in the world". It

'As adults, many of us vividly remember what we learned as children from our play'

takes courage to climb up to the noisy metal

ramps, but the sensation once this great height has been achieved, of feeling "Big, a bit more grown up", is surely something of great value.

As we watch our children playing we can see them learning the language of shapes, learning about fairness, rules, helping others and learning to cope with being hurt by others. As adults, many of us vividly remember what we learned as children from our play.

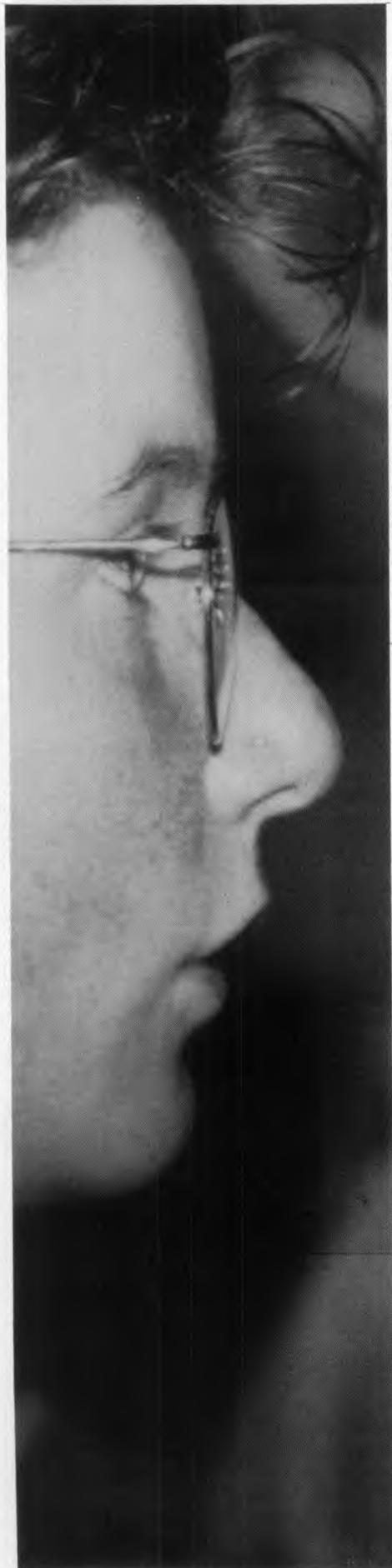
But for others the opportunities for play were never there, or were crushed, and it's difficult to say how far we have progressed since the 'bad old days'. A survey carried out two years ago found that 68% of Easterhouse children play on

outdoor equipment no more than once a year - things are not universally bright.

Children's play is about having fun and mucking about - but it's also about children finding their place in the world, using their imaginations, bodies, thoughts and feelings. The extent to which society chooses to see play as important, and puts in the effort and resources to make sure children in poor housing schemes get a chance to play creatively, is probably a fairly accurate measure of society's faith in all our futures. ■

Mark Wilson

Growing up Gay



What's it like growing up gay nowadays? Do we live in an increasingly tolerant society - or are things getting more difficult for young lesbians and gays? **Alison Bell** talks to Kate, David, Paul, Robert and Jackie (all aged between 16 and 18) to find out.

? Can you remember the first time you heard the word 'gay' or 'lesbian'?

Kate: I was quite young. We were up late watching a film, and somebody in the film said "Are you gay?". I was really curious but the babysitter wouldn't tell us what it meant. She just said "I think you'd better ask your parents".

Jackie and I were best friends for a long time before it became physical. Afterwards when it did become sort of physical between us we said "We must be gay, we must be lesbians". It's something that doesn't need a label to exist.

Paul: At primary school this boy came up to me and said "Are you gay?" I thought he meant happy, so I said "Yeah". Then he said "You're a poof! You're a poof!"

Much later there was a guy at my school who no one liked at all, he came out and told everyone he was gay - after that he got constant abuse from the rest of them. I tried to forget about it, to blank it out of my mind.

Jackie: It was quite different for me. In my house we were in contact with gay people, always gay men, never gay women. It was freely discussed. But I'm sure mostly you hear it in a negative way. Everyone will tell you that being a lesbian means you sleep with women but it's the whole person and not just that little bit.

Kate: Television is so awful, it stereotypes everything about gay people. Lesbians are seen as ugly, unattractive to men, butch. It's a really unfair way to portray us.

Robert: The typical male stereotype is camp, effeminate. Julian Clary's meant to be sending it up, but it's still the same. The character of

Colin in **EastEnders** broke that mould, he was seen as an ordinary person like everyone else. Nice. On **Play School** they always have a black person - well what about a gay person as well?

Paul: I think that now a lot of programmes are starting to show lesbians and gays in a positive light. For example in **LA Law** they're going to have a lesbian relationship.

Kate: It's amazing how much that helps. Two attractive women having a snog on the T.V. and millions of people watching and saying "Look at that, it's really quite good". The only way we are going to get people to accept us is by persuading people that we are there. So many people think that hardly anybody is gay, so it's not really an issue.

? Did you get any reliable information at school?

Paul: School is a completely no-win situation basically - sorry to sound so pessimistic. At school you don't really get any information about being gay, it's avoided. They don't want to bring it into the conversation because of the usual attitudes. Clause 28 means they're not allowed to talk about it.

Jackie: Yeah, it's really difficult. The only time that anything gay is mentioned at school is in a really negative way - poof or lezzy or lemon or some other term like that. You're supposed to take it as a real insult. I've been walking down the street and kids as young as six or seven have shouted things at me. On Comic Relief Day one of my friends was tied to the goal posts at his school so people could see a gay tied up - that was Comic Relief, that was supposed to be funny.

Paul: There is no question of it being mentioned in a class in any positive way in social or sex education. It's impossible for teachers to be gay openly. They get a lot of stick if they bring up gay things - the class immediately says 'You must be one'. You even get people you know are gay acting as homophobic as any heterosexual. If you even support the views of gay people, that's it, you're finished, slagged. I tended to get on better with people of the opposite sex, they accepted me more. People of the same sex didn't want to be seen with me in case they were branded as gay. I never went out at all when I was at home.

Kate: As you get older you drop out of the social scene totally, it's impossible for you. You lose your friends because you can't really discuss one of the most fundamental parts of your being. They all want to meet boys and you're not interested in doing that.

Robert: If they find out that you're gay you are exposed to all sorts of threats of physical violence. It could happen when you're just going down the street to get a pint of milk. You're safer not taking short cuts and sitting down-stairs on the bus. If you go to the police you are immediately setting yourself up with less of a chance of getting protected if you say you're gay.

Paul: It's true. All my gay friends who've been involved with the police have found a negative

attitude. Basically you're wasting your time with them.

David: At school AIDS was made a big thing, a lot of people were confused and they took it that it was only people who were gay or who took drugs who got AIDS. Now we know you don't have to be gay to get AIDS but people don't hear about it now so they still believe what was said a few years ago.

Jackie: Just recently there was a noticeboard at our school about a hospice going next door. One of the comments was, "Too good for poofs and junkies". The message hasn't got through at all.

Kate: For us there isn't any sex education. It's not inadequate, it's non-existent. The message isn't 'safe sex' it's 'don't get pregnant'. As a result there are a lot of younger gay men and certainly gay women who do not practice safe sex.

? How did your family take it when you told them you were gay?

Kate: My parents actually think they are being really good about it, but I don't think so. It's created a lot of tension, them knowing about me being gay. It shows up in odd ways. My mum has a bee in her bonnet about me wearing ripped jeans, and the night I came out to her she said, "Now you've given us this to cope with, will you do a small thing for me and stop wearing ripped jeans?". I'd just changed the world and she's asking me not to wear a pair of trousers!

It completely undermines you, when you finally have the guts to tell them that you're gay and they act like they don't believe you, like it's a really small thing. My dad's absolutely convinced that I stopped wanting to be a chemist and started wanting to do a sociology course because I'm gay.

Jackie: My mum say's "We love Kate, she's part of the family, but would it be alright if she doesn't come round when this particular person will be at the house". We're still not allowed to

'School is a completely no-win situation basically - sorry to sound so pessimistic'

tell anyone we're gay. The introduction is always "This is Kate, Jackie's friend". But the general reaction was positive, well not really my dad, but everybody else. I've got quite a large family and they've all been good about it, they can speak about it but they don't make a big thing of it.

A girl I know has a terrible time with her parents. They won't let her out the house, she can't use the phone. She has to attend a psychiatrist till she gets over her 'illness'. They are making her life a misery and in the end they'll gain nothing. She'll be driven away.

David: My parents didn't really say much about it, they'd already guessed, they said, "You don't think you've lived with us without us noticing these things". I felt it was a very positive reaction. We've never really spoken about it since I came out, so it hasn't really come into their lives at all. I needed to come out to my parents because otherwise I was going to continue living with my feelings bottled up, rejecting the fact that I was gay and trying to live the life of a heterosexual. I had to tell my parents so I could be myself, be open.

Robert: That's all very well for you, but I could never tell my dad. He's completely bigoted. I would be able to tell my mum but I don't want to tell her. It's quite normal to have one life at home and one life somewhere else, when you're not out. They never know where you are - for example they think I'm out with a girl tonight. I've told a few friends, but I've not told my parents. I can choose how people see me. The people that I do tell are people that I trust and feel really close to. I'm willing to take the risk with those people.

Other gay people can be pushy if you're out to them and you don't feel strong enough to tell your family. Families can be so negative, that even if you feel quite good about yourself there would be no point. Self-preservation does come into it, it has to and you should never set yourself up to live in a totally unsuitable situation. Just wait until it's right.

Jackie: Anyway it's a myth that straight people are so open with their families. There are certain things you don't want to discuss with your parents whether you're straight or gay. You just don't want to discuss what you get up to sexually with your mum.

Paul: My mum's immediate reaction was "It's a phase you're going through" and I said "But I've known for two years" and she says, "But you might still grow out of it". Your parents have so many stereotypes, they think you can't be gay because you're not 'like that'.

David: It's mainly because they are hoping that you're not. I think my mother still sees it as an insult.

Kate: On the other hand, I wouldn't ever say that I'm a lesbian and I always will be. I don't agree with sticking myself in a box and saying "Yes, label that dyke". It's as bad as when I hear straight women say "I could never sleep with a woman". But it's not popular with some gay people to say that.

? What's it like as a teenager on the gay scene meeting older lesbians and gays?

David: It's brilliant to make contact with other lesbians and gays, but you can't do it until you've reached a certain stage and are sure within yourself about what you're doing.

Jackie: It's a really funny feeling meeting other gay people for the first time, there's an incredible pressure before you do it. I remember thinking 'It's perfectly alright here, I can just be myself' and being really elated.

Paul: I thought it was strange to be in a room completely filled with gay people. It was quite a family atmosphere (*laughter*).

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Scottish Women's Aid

Scottish Women's Aid National Office services all Women's Aid groups in Scotland who provide support, information and refuge for abused women and their children. Women's Aid work requires and understanding of the causes and effects of domestic violence, and a commitment to working for the advancement of the interests of abused women and their children. The SWA collective is seeking applications for the following position:-

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Jackie: Family, what a load of rubbish! It takes a long time to break in, people can be really, really standoffish. For women, you have to be in a clique. If you don't make it into that you're a wallflower. Older lesbians just ignore you. It hurts.

Kate: Even now, when we know a lot of people, they still make comments about our age. If you are a couple you get a lot of hassle as well, it's not very trendy.

Paul: There are lots of older people who, when they see some new young man who's just appeared on the scene, come over *en masse* to chat him up. Either they want to sleep with him or they want someone younger than themselves to flash in front of all their friends and say "I've still got my virility, I'm capable of picking up younger men".

Kate: If you are under-age the scene is a problem. It revolves around bars and clubs. One night I went to a women's disco and I didn't get in the door, that annoyed me very much. I know I'm not eighteen but I'm gay, I'm a woman and I wanted to be with these other people. Just to have a good time. You also have to have quite a lot of cash. Everywhere is extortionate because they have a monopoly.

Jackie: I don't feel 'I'm gay so I only want to socialise with gay people'. But it's necessary to go somewhere where you are accepted. And there are only a couple of non-scene places that are listed as 'gay-tolerant', never mind 'gay-friendly'.

Kate: Gay men's politics and lesbian politics are very different things. Often at discos you'll find the men everywhere and somewhere in a corner at the back are the women. In general gay men are more accepted than lesbians simply because they are men.

Paul: You must be kidding! Maybe more socially acknowledged but never really accepted.

Kate: Okay, but if you're a lesbian it doesn't matter how clever you are, how good at such and such you are. How successful you are in life is measured by your sexual attractiveness to men. And if you say openly 'I'm not interested in men' you are an outcast.

? Does being gay affect your plans for the future?

Paul: It affects everything you do if you're out. If you are in the closet you can get away with doing a straight job but most people would go into a job that you can be openly gay in.

David: It would be very difficult for us to be teachers or civil servants. Or join the police. And I know from experience that it's impossible to be out in MacDonalds!

Robert: It's in all areas that you are excluded, it's not one particular field I'm worried about. It's everywhere. What about the age of consent? Its crazy, we have feelings at the same time as heterosexuals, why should we have to wait til later to express them and then only in private? I don't think having an age of consent works but if we're going to have one it should

definitely be the same for people sleeping with either sex.

Jackie: I agree. I mean if you are going out with someone you are not going to say 'Goodnight I'm going home' until you're 21 because the law says so.

Paul: I think there should be an age of consent to protect people, maybe 14 or something like that.

Robert: We're all at the age where you expect to get married and have children. When you're young, you think you'll settle down and get

'We're not like a tiny minority doing something bizarre. There are loads of us and what we want is totally normal'

married to someone. Even if you're gay you still have all that inside you.

Jackie: I don't think marriage is anything to be proud of. I can't understand why any gay people would want to get involved in it.

Paul: I think a lot of gay people still do want that piece of paper. If you are married and it doesn't work out it's a lot of hassle, but you maybe work at it a bit more. In a gay relationship you can just walk away. And there are the legal rights that marriage entitles you to.

Kate: Yes, it's very difficult for lesbians and gay men to adopt children - and in divorce cases, it's more difficult to hang on to your children if you are gay.

? Do you think that things are any better than, say, 25 years ago?

Jackie: With the recent introduction of clause 25 its getting more and more difficult. Legally in Britain it's not getting better, it's getting worse.

Kate: I think its more open than it was, now that there are clubs and organisations where gay people can meet. Beforehand there was nothing, so gay people were very isolated.

David: I disagree. I don't think young people nowadays accept gayness any more than they ever did. It's a real threat if they see somebody saying "I am gay". Their immediate reaction to that is to be aggressive, offensive.

Jackie: Teachers shouldn't be scared to talk to you about your sexuality and that means starting at an earlier age. It's not just a case of 'sex education' in third year or whenever - it has to be before that or it's too late. It probably has to begin in primary school.

Teachers should deal with anti-gay stuff as it comes up. If someone makes a racist comment in the classroom, it's not always sorted out, but often the teacher takes it on. It should be the same for anti-gay comments. But I think it'll be a long time before anything like that happens.

Paul: Let's face it there are loads of homophobic teachers. For teachers and other folk in positions of authority, homosexuality is a really touchy subject. That's because as soon as you talk about somebody else's sexuality your own comes into it. It's there whether it's being openly discussed or not.

Jackie: You can't promote homosexuality, like clause 28 goes on about, you can't influence heterosexuals to be gay. It's something you either are or you aren't, it's not a case of saying "come and join us - and be rejected by your family". Promotion is a ridiculous word, it's like you're trying to sell something. Homosexuality is not something that can be sold, it's not something you can change about yourself. The government are saying that if homosexual images are shown in people's homes that will make people homosexual. That's just bullshit, they know it isn't true. It would just make things easier for people who are gay.

? What do you think you've learnt from the experience of coming out?

Robert: I'd tell anyone who's gay to get good information and try to speak to someone else who's gay and understands a bit about what you're feeling. When you decide that you're gay you've got to find things out about yourself and learn to accept yourself.

Jackie: It's not being gay that's the problem - it's the way you are perceived by everybody else! You're not allowed to be yourself, you have to really fight for it. A lot of gay people never do come out, they're hidden away. You need the support of other gay people and people who are broad minded. In some circumstances it's actually better not to come out.

Kate: Teachers and people should know of a helpline and at least try to help the young person make contact with someone who will listen to them. It's the same as if someone is telling you they were abused. You shouldn't be able to ignore it when someone comes to you and says "I'm gay". Even if you want to.

Paul: Even if all you do is find a phone number - it's an ear, even if it isn't your own ear.

Jackie: I'd go further than that. If a young person comes to you and you are an adult then it's up to you to be as positive as you can. Number one, you have to believe a young person who tells you they're gay. They are never just going to say it for a laugh or a dare. You have to take it seriously. The worst thing you can do is laugh or say it's only a phase. Doing something for young lesbians and gays isn't something for a few people, it's for the benefit of a lot of people. There are lots of us around, and acknowledging that is really, really necessary. We're not like a tiny minority doing something bizarre. There are loads of us and what we want is totally normal. ■

A Walk with Ru



We often assume that children brought up in the richer countries of Europe and North America have a better upbringing than those brought up in the poorer countries of the world. But do they? In the first article in our new **Scotland in the World** series **Yvonne Burgess**, a Scot who spent five years living in Zimbabwe, compares the way children are brought up in Scotland and Zimbabwe - and suggests we may have quite a bit to learn from that 'underdeveloped' country.

I have just come back from walking round the still African township of a provincial town in Zimbabwe with my friend's baby, Rukudzo, strapped to my back. Because I am white, I arouse a lot of interest and amusement. People want to know if the child is mine, where I'm

from, how long I've been in Zimbabwe, who taught me to carry the baby African style. They are surprised and pleased to see me doing things their way.

Since I have been living in Zimbabwe I have felt my belly relaxing as I handle babies. After years of hand-wringing anxiety as a student and young traveller about dreaded pregnancy - the horrible family implications, the years of solitary drudgery stretching ahead like a prison sentence - this new sense of welcome within my own body comes as a wonderful release of tension.

But it is also disorienting and disturbing. I am forced to ask myself why I feel so much more willing to have a child in Zimbabwe than I ever did in Scotland. Whatever the reasons for our inhibitions at home, many European women who come here to work feel the same change in attitude as I do. Many go ahead and have babies while they are here, whether or not they are in a stable partnership.

This 'easiness' is practical and economic, as well as emotional and psychological. No one in Zimbabwe lacks someone to look after their children when they cannot. But the most important thing is the way in which you are continually made to feel that the community welcomes your children.

Wherever you go with a baby people will take her in their arms, play with her, exercise her limbs, talk to her (and you) - and that goes for men and boys as well as women and girls. If she cries they will calm her down by singing to her, moving her around, offering her something to distract her. If her hat falls off or she is uncomfortable, they will reach out and put it right, without making a fuss. They will share responsibility for her as a new member of the human community to which we all belong, and on which we all rely for love, nurture and respect, in order to grow up whole.

Of course we in Britain welcome our children too. When they arrive, something opens up in us



that never closes again. Many new parents say that the birth of their first child is the greatest event of their lives - although I don't have children, I have seen the change often enough to believe in it completely.

But I am troubled by how the way our children are loved and welcomed into the world has become so privatised, so shut off from the public sphere. Many parents feel isolated and weighed down by the burden of their responsibility. Mothers especially are tied to their infants in a way that must be unhealthy both for them and for their children.

I have one friend whose two-year-old daughter bursts into tears every time she leaves the room. Other friends of mine have not had a full night's sleep for two years or more because of their children. I think of a friend whose husband never once gets out of bed to their twins; of a single mother, ill in bed, trying to entertain her four-year-old; of many more friends who are parents, trying to keep it all together in their

**'In decisive,
character-forming
ways rural
Zimbabwe offers a
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their parents than
Scotland does'**

lonely struggle. What has happened to our way of life in the rich countries that we isolate and pressurise parents, making the first few years of child-rearing such a trial of endurance as well as a joy and blessing? By way of an answer, let me caricature some of our 'typical' attitudes and habits.

The Urban Scene

We in the prosperous countries of the 'north' - North America, most of Europe, the rich countries - tend to think that time is money and that we can't afford to 'waste' it. We are often 'too busy' to have time for children. Fathers especially put their energies into ensuring material security for their children, working long hours at overdemanding or unrewarding jobs, rather than spending time with the children they are supposedly working so hard for.

'Economically active' northern adults do not tend to spend much time playing and pottering about, the sort of things you do with children around. Even our leisure time will often ex-



Lucy Enfield

► clude children - drinking, smoking, having grown-up conversations or going out to watch films sprinkled with sex and violence.

One result of all these 'typical' habits is that those who do spend time with children, usually their mothers, often feel like banned people under house-arrest. Post-natal depression is one expression of this feeling - it doesn't exist in Zimbabwe, where newborn babies and their mothers are the centre of everyone's joyful and curious attention. In Zimbabwe, many hands of all sizes are eager to share the work of childcare.

Our society has separated people from land, home from work and private from public in a way that almost guarantees that women who look after their children at home will feel excluded from the public sphere 'where it's all happening'. In contrast to traditional African society, or traditional European society for that matter, modern European mothers are not regarded as 'economically active' while looking after their children. What does this say about our society? How can public life be full and complete if it excludes children and their mothers?

I don't believe it can. Do those activities most highly rewarded by our society - research, production, advertising, financial wheeling-dealing - have any intrinsic value, any meaning in and of themselves? Surely the value of an activity is dependent upon how much it helps to support life and make it better? Not surprisingly, perhaps, in our society, one that excludes mothers and children from much public life, many of the most highly rewarded income-generating activities - the arms industry, wasteful research and production, financial 'services' and so on - destroy more life than they sustain.

Split off from the serious, grown-up, dog-eat-dog 'real world' into a saccharin, pseudo-private Disneyland of kiddies products, the average northern mother bites back her frustration and sense of humiliation. During her most vital years she and her children are held in a physical and emotional compression chamber, cut off from friends and relatives, in a nightmare of housework, boredom, interrupted sleep and exhaustion. Her work continues without a break throughout these years, cooking, cleaning, washing, ironing - all the time with the almost sole

responsibility of her children's care. Meanwhile, daddy is chasing his tail at work in the 'real world', deprived of the time with his children he so desperately needs for his own - and their - sanity and health.

When we are finally pushed off the treadmill by retirement or heart disease, many northerners turn round and realise that they have wasted irreplaceable years of their lives. They have been worrying and working instead of getting to know their children. They have not been savouring life as it blossomed or building up the solid relationships with their children that will see them through their declining years.

This terrible realisation dawns eventually on millions of parents and grandparents, but often too late to save their relationships with their children. Yet we seem unable to draw any collective lesson from this realisation. It touches each of us, if it touches us at all, separately, and completely unexpectedly. Why is it that despite all these individual tragedies our society still resists the lesson such experiences teach us?

I believe our resistance stems at least in part

from our lack of respect for other traditions, indeed for traditions *per se*. We see ourselves as 'advanced' and 'progressive' and have a horror of turning the clock back. It is hard for us to look to peoples we regard as 'inferior' and 'backward' for guidance. But this is where the guidance lies - if we are humble enough to ask for it.

The Rural Scene

A rural African mother goes about her normal daily work - around the home, in the fields, at the river - with her children in tow, either on her back or walking behind her. She does not live behind closed doors, she lives out-of-doors or with the doors open. The position of the father is likely to be more similar to us - if he is not away in the town working for money he may be out drinking with his friends. But if he is helping in the fields, or doing some building or making tools, then he is as accessible as the mother.

From the age of about 18 months, little ones are incorporated into the world around them. Work and play are not divided, with people of all ages around all the time. Work is taught to children like a role play, with ceremony and applause for a task completed. Mothers and their young children are not isolated from the rest of society.

Rural life in Africa is far from idyllic or easy. Indeed, it is getting harder all the time, mainly because of continuing white dominance and greed. But I think we need to re-examine our usual rather patronising image of the 'doubly-oppressed' African woman with her undernourished and ill-educated children. We would do well to re-evaluate how our own lives compare with theirs.

It is true that I am 'free' to travel and consume, while my rural friends in Zimbabwe are often cashless and sometimes hard-pressed for food. But in decisive, character-forming ways rural Zimbabwe offers a more balanced, varied and satisfying life for young children and their parents than Scotland does.

In Scotland, for instance, parenting is both a private and an unpractised skill - "You learn on the first, practice on the second and the third looks after itself". Our consumerist society has gradually cut us off from one another so that we grow up in our separate households with scarcely any experience in childcare. We have to start from scratch on our own first child, often passing on the anxiety we feel in this situation to our first-born children.

Parenting in Africa is far from single-handed - in fact the mother may sometimes feel swamped by good advice and bossy aunts. In Africa the care and responsibility for children is shared amongst many people, not just the parents. Nowadays, especially amongst more affluent Africans, that is being eroded, but African children are still brought up in a much more open way than would be considered at all 'normal' in Scotland.

A Brutal Progress

The fear of failure - for oneself and one's children - lies, I believe, close to the root of all

our northern anxiety. At the same time as wreaking havoc in our own psyches and relationships, this fear and anxiety has given us a thirst for overwhelming global power. Our insecurity has driven us to achievements in the outer world that, we hope, will compensate for our lost inner security. It has fed an outward fearlessness and disrespect towards other cultures and other powers - human, material or spiritual.

This quality of ours arouses wonder and distrust in those who belong to the less destructive cultures we have over-run. I didn't notice this without help - it was pointed out to me by a black Englishman of West Indian, i.e. African slave, origin.

'How can public life be full and complete if it excludes children and their mothers?'

This combination of inner fear and outer fearlessness has stayed with us as we have conquered, and now control, the world. But our ceaseless pursuit of material security has not made family life more secure. Children of anxious northern parents often come to resent their parents' misguided priorities later in life, blaming them for depriving them of the security, intimacy, time, love and attention they wanted and needed as children.

Many of us will be familiar with such stories of unresolved family conflict from our own experience. The increasingly felt need for psychological therapy in adulthood is a barometer of the emotional deprivation and imbalance built into 'normal' childhood in the rich countries. But what most of our writers on emotional and psychological disorders - and their healing - usually fail to acknowledge is that our culture is, even today, a very atypical, minority culture.

Our minority status is disguised to us by two factors. Firstly, we ourselves have spread to many regions of the world through settlement - to the Americas, Southern Africa, Australasia and elsewhere. Secondly, through colonialism and neo-colonialism we have imposed our administrative and economic structures (governments, armies, schools, supermarkets, and so on) on most of the world. The external paraphernalia of our culture - Coke, jeans, television, business suits - are everywhere.

But our culture, in world terms, is still a minority one. The fact that Africans and Asians watch videos or relax on enormous sofas does not make them Europeans. They do not think, feel or act according to the norms that have helped to form our behaviour and attitudes. They have grown up in their own, very different, cultures.

If we could see our society in a more realistic perspective, as one culture amongst many, we would become more able to learn from the experiences of other peoples. But we seem unwilling to do so. We seem to expect people of other cultures to always be learning from us, the 'experts', even though our attitude to many essential aspects of life - parenting, the elderly,

the spiritual, disease, death - is clearly unhealthy and inhuman when viewed alongside other societies' traditional norms.

What Can We Do?

Zimbabwean culture has much to teach us, not least about the importance of sharing parenting and sharing our children with others. This is obviously easier if we live in larger groups than nuclear families, but we can also share childcare more between different households. Rural and working class families have always shared childcare more readily than middle class families, even though they may be living in separate households. Mortgages, careers, social mobility and so on are only barriers to sharing childcare if we let them be. It is up to us.

Secondly, we must learn the importance of constantly trying to become and remain true to ourselves. We live in a threatening and competitive world, and we owe it to ourselves and our children to be honest about that, without getting caught up in hostile, fear-filled attitudes ourselves. We must resist the pressures to compete, to measure our achievements, and those of our children, against others. We can base the choices we make in our lives on values that are of real meaning to us.

Of course these issues face us whether we have children or not - but perhaps when we become parents they become more challenging. For up until that time many of us do, in a very real sense, benefit from the mobility and socio-economic freedom from responsibility that our society offers us. We are young, single, have our health, our wealth and our sexual drive and attractiveness - the world is, as they say, our oyster. It is only when we lose our mobility and freedom - by ageing, becoming ill or by having children - that these strange temporary privileges begin to militate against us. Living far from our parents may suddenly seem like a more mixed blessing once we have our first child. Not having a lot of relatives to turn to may come to seem more like deprivation than freedom.

In Zimbabwe you do not have to go against the tide of public attitudes and practices to bring up children well - society is basically respectful and friendly towards children and parents. That is not something I feel is the case in Britain. Zimbabweans still regard children as the joyful central focus and function of family life. In Zimbabwean culture a person who dies without children is a lost spirit, for who will keep their memory alive? Whom will they guide and protect once they have entered into the enhanced knowledge and power of the spiritual realm? For whom will they have lived?

Many parents I know in Scotland say that having children has made them more concerned about the future of the world than they were before - some feel they have become more optimistic as a result. Other friends of mine say they are pessimistic about the future, despite their day-to-day lives bearing witness to a strong and positive faith in people and in themselves. Perhaps the two ways of looking at life should go together - for if we hope to be involved in change for the better we need to be able to look at things unflinchingly as they really are - and still have faith in our common future. ■

LAW AND ORDER



There never has been a time when young people weren't seen by adults as unruly, out of control and getting worse. But how do young people themselves view crime? We talk to three young people - in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen - about their experience of crime and punishment; and **Colin Chalmers** looks at a recent study in Edinburgh that questions the widespread view of young people as perpetrators of crime - never as victims.

'Young people and crime'. The very phrase tends to conjure up images of gangs, vandalism, young people *as criminals*. Just contrast it with the image conjured up by the phrase 'old people and crime' - quite different, almost certainly one of old people *as victims* of crime. Yet it's a fact - a fact that does not seem to register easily with many - that young people are far more likely to be the victim of crime than old people.

Politicians, the media, the legal system - most adults in fact - seem almost blind to the fact that young people come across crime in any other way than as perpetrators. It is certainly true that young people do commit crime, a lot of it, but

'None of the clubs are open over the summer, they shut them down because they don't have the money to keep them open'

adult society seems overly keen to leave it at that, to not look any deeper at what young people think about crime and how they experience it.

A recent study carried out at Edinburgh University's Centre for Criminology has gone some way to balancing this one-sided view of young people and crime. The researchers asked over a thousand young people about their experience of crime in public places, that is outside home and school. They came up with some startling findings that question some widely held assumptions about young people and crime.

One thing that the findings seem to suggest is that the search for a 'delinquent minority' responsible for crime amongst the young is about as illusory as the search for the Holy Grail. There certainly are some young people who commit serious crimes and engage in crime a lot, but they are a tiny minority, and, more importantly, do not account for most crime amongst young people.

In fact, over two thirds of the young people talked to said they had committed some kind of offence in the previous nine months, usually shoplifting, vandalism or being rowdy in the street. Those who might be termed 'delinquent' - young people involved in persistent criminal activity - were responsible for only a tiny proportion of crimes actually committed.

Another interesting finding was the extent to which crime amongst young people did not vary greatly between poor areas and better-off areas. There was some variation between poorer and better-off areas - but not much. For instance 38% of the youngsters from one peripheral housing scheme had committed vandalism within the last nine months, compared with 31% in one of Edinburgh's leafy suburbs. Shop-

STUART, Glasgow

I tell you the truth, I used to steal, I used to go shoplifting. I started when I was about 13, I'd steal earphones, aftershave, stuff like that, and sell it. It's a challenge, if you can get away with it it's a laugh, so you do it again till you get caught. You start off on wee daft things then it goes up and up to teles and stereos.

I first got caught when I was 14, they caught me round the corner with something in my hand. I was stupid doing it, but it was something to do, it was a laugh. They took me home to my ma and dad. It was good at the time though, it was funny, it was a buzz.

I know people who do burglaries, a lot of the time it's for drugs. A lot of folk take motors, dump them and burn them. It's stupid cause after they're caught that's it as far as driving goes.

It's boredom. No money. There's nothing to keep you off the streets. You want something to take your mind off doing stupid things. See from one end of this street to the end you'll see hundreds of teenagers floating about, doing fuck all. None of the clubs are open over the summer, they shut them down because they don't have the money to keep them open.

You need a club every night of the week. My dad said they had a lot more facilities when he was my age. We like pool, I love it, but is that all there is?

You get abused by the police. "Hey you, stop loitering", so you say "Going to give us something to do then?" and they go "Don't be cheeky or you're going in the back of that motor and you'll be down the station in two seconds flat".

They used to take cigarettes off you if you were under sixteen. There's places they could bust, drug-dealers, they know them themselves but they don't want to do that because they'll have guns with them, so they come back to us. We're helpless, all we can do is run away.

I was up in court because I was abused. I was about eight, they took me up the court when I was ten, it took them two years just to get me up the court. They go "What did he do?" and I say "What do you think he done?" They know, they know what abuse is and they're asking all these questions. It's embarrassing, in front of the jury and everyone. He got away with it because they didn't have enough evidence, just me and another boy.

lifting showed the same pattern - while nearly half of the young people from poorer areas said they had shoplifted in the nine month period, so did a third of those living in wealthier areas of the city. Across the city an identical proportion of boys - 42% - admitted to 'carrying a knife as a weapon' at some time during the nine-month period.

So doesn't all this prove the very point that young people are committing crime on a widespread basis? It undoubtedly shows that a lot of young people commit crimes, but these crimes tend to be of a minor nature, and most young people do not commit a lot of them. What the

'Half the folk at sixteen aren't getting any money at all, so they steal and get in trouble with the polis'

Edinburgh survey does startlingly reveal is the extent to which we need to readjust our thinking about young people and crime to take account of the large amounts of crime committed against young people.

Young people are much more likely to be the victims of crime than adults - and many of the crimes they are victims of are committed by adults. Half of the young people questioned in the Edinburgh survey had been assaulted, seriously threatened or robbed in the previous nine months - 37% had been assaulted, 31% had been seriously threatened and 17% had been robbed. Not only are older people much less likely than young people to be victimised in this way, but with adults class position and the area that they live in will heavily affect their chance of becoming a victim of a crime - not so with young people.

Between a quarter and a third of the crimes committed against young people were committed by adults - for instance over a quarter of assaults reported by young people were committed by people that the victim described as over 18. Sexual harassment would seem to be a pretty common occurrence for young teenagers today as well; over the survey's nine-month period, no less than 30% of the 13, 14 and 15 year old girls talked to had been the victims of sexual offences by adult men - 'indecent exposure', 'men touching or trying to touch them', 'men trying to get them to go away with them' or 'men trying to get them to touch them'.

By any standard, these are disturbing findings. That such widespread abuse of young people by adults is taking place in public is bound to contribute to a very realistically based mistrust of adults by young people in such public places. But this mistrust would seem to be made much worse by young people's experience of those

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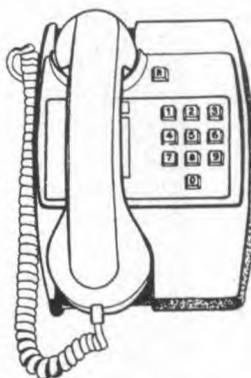
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Employee Ownership in Scotland

JAMIE Aberdeen

People get started because of lack of money, living in rough areas like this place here. You like to have money in your pocket. If you go for a stereo in a car that's a quick £20, £30. House-breaking, you'll sell videos for £50, £60 a time. People on the social can't afford to buy brand new stuff. I wouldn't steal from the people around here now, I'd go into a mansion or a shop or something, they're all well insured.

We get lots of hassle off the police. I got lifted the other week for pushing a car into a car park. I got done for disqualified driving, no insurance and breaking bail, for pushing a car that doesn't go six feet. The blame always comes back to you once you're known.

The police have to be there for murders, that sort of thing, serious assaults, rapes, whatever. But they go over the score with people about petty crime, with people like us.

A lot of people don't do it for the money, a lot do it for the buzz, a laugh. I used to steal cars and go right up beside the cop cars just to get a chase from them, just for a buzz. There's nothing here except this Community Centre and this doesn't give out much.

I've been to Young Offenders', Approved Schools, Assessment Centres, when you go into places like that all you're doing is learning how to be a criminal. When I went from Approved Schools into Y.O.s that's when you start learning things. I was only in for shoplifting, that's all I used to do, then as soon as I went in there there were people telling me how to take alarms off shops, things like that. You go in there, and all that happens is you're building up your criminal mind.

You know you'll end up in prison when you're in Approved Schools, that's always what happens. I'll go back, I can't change that. See if I go for a job and say I've got a criminal record, put the truth in, you always get knocked back. If I could get a job I'd take a job but I cannae get a job. So I have to steal for money. Have you ever tried to live on £55 per fortnight?

They pay so much money to keep a prisoner in prison per week. It doesn't need all that money to keep him outside. If you put half that money on the unemployment money it would be alright.

I get nothing so I end up stealing. The government's a lot of shit. That's it. End of story. They need to give school-leavers money again. There's no jobs or YTS. You need money to survive. Of course it's wrong stealing, but you have to do it to survive.

SUSAN Edinburgh

I was fourteen when I got sent to the Assessment Centre because I kept running away from home. I just didn't like my home, and the social workers took me into the Assessment Centre. It was a dive. It shouldn't be allowed for staff to hit you, that's one thing. That was happening, it's still happening in children's homes, you can't tell me it doesn't.

If you were doing anything out of order you were getting hurt for it, arms up the back and all this. Maybe it was to control you but they were going over the score. They locked people in their rooms, for ages. They'd just pick the ones who could stay out their rooms and everyone else had to go to their rooms. I got put in my room a few times, quite a few times. If you were in trouble before teatime you got a bit of toast for your tea.

There's all different reasons why young people get into crime. Sometimes they just do it for something to do. The first thing I ever got done for was Breach of the Peace, I was 16 and I was drunk. I got admonished. I'm a different person when I'm drunk. My second charge was a serious assault, fighting with this woman. We were drinking, it was just a stupid fight about nothing.

I got fully committed for that, 110 days lie down, remanded in custody in Cornton Vale (Scotland's women's prison). I appealed before my full committal was up, but I did about a month and a half there. I was seventeen. Cornton Vale was terrible. You were getting custard powder in your macaroni, people spitting in your tea, if they didn't like you they'd do that. Everyone was just fed up because they were in the jail, weren't they? Have you ever been in the jail?

The courts aren't fair. Half the witnesses are liars and the judges are listening to it. The polis are just bastards. Some of them are alright, but most of them are animals. They'll hit lassies, they've hit me, I can't stand them. You've got to have police but they don't need to go over the score like they do. Have you seen the lickings people have had off the polis? People getting battered up and down the place, getting their teeth knocked out, all that.

A lot of young folk who steal are just getting themselves into a lot of trouble. What's the point of stealing? The social's not given them much money, that's how they're stealing, half the folk at sixteen aren't getting any money at all, so they steal and get in trouble with the polis.

'in authority' - and that, very often, means the police.

Young people usually encounter the police through adversary contact on the streets. The Edinburgh survey found that over its nine months period nearly half of the young people interviewed had been moved on or told off by the police; a quarter had been stopped and questioned by the police; and one in ten had been arrested or detained in a police station. This police behaviour would seem to have led to a level of cynicism amongst young people - young people are reported as seeing the police as having a 'quite poor' (32%) or 'very poor' (20%) understanding of their problems.

'Of course it's wrong stealing, but you have to do it to survive'

Young people do not appear to be anti-police as such. Not surprisingly perhaps, given their experience of violence and harassment, most of the ones talked to in the survey said they would feel safer with more policemen on foot patrols. But the reality for most young people is not one where the police are seen as being there to help you - the fact that too many police see young people as a 'problem' to be contained rather than as people who need their protection inevitably leads to mistrust between young people and the police. As Susan from Edinburgh puts it "You've got to have police, but they don't need to go over the score like they do".

Given this mistrust, it's perhaps not surprising that the Edinburgh survey found a very low rate of crime reporting by young people - significantly lower than with adults. For instance, young people only reported 14% of assaults against them to the police - and girls reported less than one in five of the sexual offences committed against them. Such low reporting rates may very well grow out of a mistrust of the police, but they also feed it. For if young people do not report crimes then adults in general, and the police in particular, will go on believing that young people do not really suffer from crime - a view that the Edinburgh survey has clearly shown to be a myth. Until adults start treating seriously young people's need for protection against crime, young people will no doubt continue to show a good deal of mistrust to those who claim to be there for their protection.

A summary of the findings of Cautionary Tales: a study of young people and crime in Edinburgh by Simon Anderson, Richard Kinsey, Ian Loader and Connie Smith is available from the Centre of Criminology, 20 Chambers Street, Edinburgh.

Courage is Infectious too!



Strong at the Broken Places **Overcoming the Trauma of Childhood Abuse**

Linda T Sanford
Virago £6.99

Colin Chalmers

At the beginning of this book we are told of a workplace meeting where someone is giving a talk about 'dysfunctional families'. The speaker continues for some time with his negative description of adults who have grown up in such families, listing their difficulties, their problems, their generally hopeless lives. In a shaky voice Rachel, a survivor of a violent and abusive family, gets up and says:

"You told us this morning that statistically almost half the adults in America have been affected by family violence, that those people, in turn, beat their kids, mainline heroin or go on

food binges. First of all, some of that half is in this room. Secondly, I know there's a way out. Good people can come from bad families. That's true for our employees and it's true for us. We are everywhere."

It's stories like this, of people standing up for themselves, that make this book such an inspiration to read. Linda Sanford's aim in this book is to challenge the 'damaged goods' theory of childhood abuse - the idea that if you suffered abuse as a child then you're never really going to be able to overcome it as an adult. That's a view that has a lot of credence in our society.

When survivors of child abuse speak about their experience, they very often come up against 'experts' who, while trying to be understanding and sympathetic, cannot accept that it is possible for them to really work through the abuse they suffered as children.

The fact is that many survivors of childhood abuse are far from defeated by their trauma. This is not to minimise the effects of child abuse - far from it - but it is to recognise that abuse does not, necessarily, 'determine' people's lives.

Looking at particular acts of abuse in isolation from their context is a very adult way of seeing child abuse. The author of this book has worked with victims and survivors for seventeen years - she recognises the horrific and systematic abuse that some children are subjected to. But she points out that abuse can also be quite 'normal' - not paying attention to a child when she needs it, 'acceptable' violence against children, a 'firm' approach to child-rearing.

For the child, it is the frightening, unpredictable behaviour of the all-powerful adult that is central to the experience of abuse. The similarities between different forms of abuse - sexual abuse, violence, abandonment, and so on - are much greater for the child than the differences. It is the experience of being used for someone else's ends that matters, that makes the child suppress her own needs in order to meet the needs of the adult. That's something children do all too readily. As Bowlby, quoted in this book, puts it:

"To recognise frankly that a mother is exploiting you for her own ends, or that a father is unjust and tyrannical, or that neither parent ever wanted you, is intensely painful. Moreover it is very frightening. Given any loophole, therefore, most children will seek to see their parents' behaviour in some more favourable light. This natural bias of children is easy to exploit."

Child abuse is traumatic because the victim has to shut down in some way in order to cope - and that has its costs. Quite 'ordinary' abuse can lead to a child blaming herself for being fundamentally bad, especially if there is no one there to turn to for comfort. A child can decide simply to stop feeling, because the feelings of hurt, guilt and despair are just too overwhelming to handle.

These feelings don't go away, of course; they just get buried. Sanford writes of abused children putting on a 'winter coat' to get them through the hell they are in. Later, with the right help and the right support, they can learn to take off this winter coat that has outlived its usefulness. They can come back to the land of the living.

There are some people, however, who never get the chance to take off that 'winter coat'. They continue to disassociate themselves from what has happened to them, cutting off the pain. All those people who joke about being hit when they were kids are doing that. When adults deal, or rather don't deal, with their abuse in this way

they will tend to deny that anything painful happened at all in their childhood and continue to idealise the person who abused them. There is every chance they will go on to abuse their own children; after all, as they tell themselves endlessly, 'it never did me any harm'. And children are such easy victims for these people's hidden, unconscious rage.

The problem is that many 'experts' think that all victims of child abuse are likely to grow up to be like this. It's a bit like saying that everyone who gets knocked down by a car and breaks their leg gets up and limps around as if nothing has happened. People can ask for help. People can do something to make things better.

The links between how the child coped with being abused and how the adult deals with her pain are usually quite concrete, quite clear, if you take the trouble to look. Addictions in adult life help people avoid feelings, something they learnt to do as a child. Survivors who fear intimacy will fear it for a quite specific reason, their own reason, their own pain that they cannot face. Then there's the intellectual, like Rita, who escapes from the horror of her situation into her mind, going on to be able to "more easily understand existentialism than her parents' alcoholism and violence".

Many survivors will tell you that the most authentic and real feeling they have is the feeling of somehow being 'not real' or 'not quite here'. The 'damaged goods' merchants will see this as just another unchangeable facet of these people's lives - it's how people who have been abused end up and there's not a lot anyone can do about it. In fact this feeling of unreality is a perfectly recognisable stage in a grieving process. It results from a shutting off of a pain that is too much to cope with.

The fact that so many children and adults live with such feelings for years - sometimes for their whole lives - is a testament to just how little help our medical and social services offer survivors of childhood abuse. If what you are grieving is seen by everyone around you as 'nothing to do with your present situation', or is not even acknowledged as ever having happened, then it's maybe not that surprising that so many people get left at this stage. Simply feeling unreal all your life isn't a problem a lot of our 'caring' services are going to help you with - they just don't seem to know what to do about it.

By keeping childhood pain at arm's length, as many of our caring services do, they deny survivors the chance to grieve their lost childhood. The trauma of child abuse is stored in the survivor's body, in the shame they feel for just being alive, in that feeling of 'not really being here'. The way out of that is not easy, especially in a society that feels quite happy to ignore and trivialise child abuse; it requires enormous courage. But it can be done.

There is nothing mystical about it either. There is a child buried in there waiting to get out, put in 'deep freeze' until a cure is found. The fear

of stepping out is, of course, enormous. It means getting in touch with feelings that appear to be overwhelming. As Laura says about her fear of expressing any feelings, "If I ever started to cry, I'd cry a river. If I ever got angry, I'd blow up a building. If I ever felt the terror of it all, I'd disintegrate into nothing".

But there is a road back. It is being able to feel angry without the world falling to bits, crying and finding the tears don't last for ever, learning to grieve and having someone, or some group of people, who will help you do that.

This book is full of stories of people who have found a way of overcoming their childhood abuse. People like Beth. She did not have a happy childhood; she remembers her family as "looking good on the outside" but being a mess to live in. Her parents battled constantly, throwing insults at each other all the time. She remembers her parents as being like "two halves of a brittle, chipped teacup patched together with glue. If the teacup broke again, neither half would be any good."

As an adult, we are told, "Beth became a therapist at a residential treatment centre for severely abused children who have been removed from their homes. In Beth's mind, these children are deserving of a sympathetic listener. She lives through their therapy vicariously but believes her own 'time for such things has long passed'. Her intellect keeps 'self-pity' in check."

For Beth, this work was a safe haven, a way of avoiding her feelings about her own childhood abuse by letting the kids she would counsel "do the feeling" for her. She describes how she would be "going along, minding my own business, getting through a normal day. But I'm getting too wound up, not letting my feelings out as they happen". When the feelings burst through she feels she is "unstable, a raving lunatic, like my sister and mother" until she is able, once again, to "stuff those feelings back into the metal box".

When someone describes her as "driving eighty miles an hour with your emergency brake on" Beth sees that she is doing exactly that - keeping the "emergency break" on her real feelings while pushing ahead with her work with abused children. "I'm not objective," she realises, "I'm dead from the neck down."

So she does something about it. She gets a good therapist and joins a group of survivors, being able "first to feel more, then to feel better". She describes her road to recovery:

"I try to have compassion for myself, to accept the depth of my feelings. You know, if I'd been able to let any of my rage or tears out when I was a child, it wouldn't be popping out today. I try to make constructive choices about how I express my feelings, but I finally know my feelings are not my enemy".

There is more to being a survivor than just surviving. As Paul tells us:

"I know my past is there but I don't dwell on it. I look around me, at how beautiful my children are, the power of the river, the coziness of the hills that surround me, the colours of the sunset, and I think, life is good."

Some people who have faced up to their childhood suffering go on to work with others who need help - not vicariously avoiding their own suffering, but helping others out of a sense of shared, common humanity. Joan, once a suicidal teenager, now counsels adolescents, and has special training in dealing with suicidal young people. "I know where they end and I begin - my boundaries are good. If not, I'd do more harm than good. But every time one of those kids stops obsessing about suicide, I do feel like I've saved a little piece of myself."

Peeking out from under your 'winter coat' is not easy. If you have had to shut off your most spontaneous and essential self in order to survive as a child - and millions of people have had to - it is not an easy ride back. If, as a child, you learnt that adults are not to be trusted, it is not going to be easy later on to reveal that vulnerable, hurt child to anyone else. What is valuable about this book is that it shows, without in any way minimising the trauma caused by childhood abuse, the way in which ordinary people manage to do just that.

Our society isn't that interested in fighting child abuse - in fact it often perpetuates the very abuse that it supposedly finds so abhorrent. There are thousands of women and children in Scotland turned away by Women's Aid hostels every year because there are nothing like the number of hostels needed to help people getting out of abusive homes. There are Housing Departments who term teenagers who run away from domestic violence 'intentionally homeless' if their parents deny hitting them. There are some social workers who believe that it is wrong to intervene in situations where children are being assaulted by their parents because 'it's a cultural thing, and we've no right to impose our values'. Fear of challenging the abuser, and the refusal to hear the pain of the victim that goes along with that, is institutionalised in hospitals, hostels and care establishments throughout the land.

But, as Alice Miller puts it at the end of this book, "Courage can be just as infectious as fear". There are a lot of people who have been abused as children and have overcome that abuse, have managed to work it through. The 'large and secret club' of those who have survived childhood abuse need not put up with pseudoscientific dismissals of their experiences, need not accept that 'nothing can be done'. The 'large and secret club' need not remain secret for ever. And when the everyday courage and strength of survivors of childhood abuse, a courage and strength documented so well in this book, is turned into a collective demand that society recognise abuse and do something meaningful to combat it - then the 'it never did me any harm' mob are going to have a proper wee fight on their hands. ■

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Facts and Figures and Singing Children

Protecting Working Children
edited by
William Myers
Zed Books / United Nations £10.95

**Childcare in Rural
Communities**
Julia Palmer
SCAFA £7.50

Mwe Bana Bandi video,
available from Scottish Education
and Action for Development
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Rosemary Milne



Protecting Working Children is a selection of writings by academics and policy experts on the situation of working children in Third World countries. It begins by looking at studies done on the working lives of child hawkers in urban Nigeria and Lima and at the plight of children all over India engaged in a multitude of different jobs, from street tea boys to workers in match and carpet factories.

We are warned in the introduction by the editor, William Myers, a senior consultant at the United Nations, of the dangers of over-simplifying the problem, of the tendency of professionals to analyse the phenomenon in terms of their own specialisms: welfare, health or criminality and of how options for action can harm the very children they are supposed to help.

No-one wants to be accused of over simplifying a problem as serious as this. Still the bald facts do seem quite straightforward - at least if you start from the principle, which this book does not, that working to support your family from the age of five is an intolerable burden on any child. Despite what some of the contributors assert, the child labour dealt with in this book has nothing to do with handing on skills from one generation to the next. It's about survival - for the child and for his or her dependents.

Working children come from poor families, whether they live in the city or the country. Almost without exception children work because they have to; they do so for exceptionally low wages and sometimes none; they are in the poorest, most dangerous, dirtiest jobs least sought after by anyone else; they often work and try to go to school - or they work instead of going to school. Many of them labour as much as ten hours a day. Besides being tired all the time, they risk a whole range of other hazards - sexual abuse, abduction, and physical accidents to name but a few.

Programmes of help are few and far between. We are told that Brazil would require about 20,000 community programmes, each serving roughly 200 children to reach half the current estimated number of street children. We also learn that in Brazil "after six years of pronounced effort there are at the last count fewer than 500 such programmes and probably nowhere else in the world has community mobilisation for helping street children been more widely successful". The reason for this paucity of development is more clearly spelt out in a subsequent chapter on the street kids of Khartoum. The author, Cole P Dodge, (UNICEF representative, Bangladesh, former UNICEF representative, Sudan), explains that the Ministry of Social Welfare has been restricted in its development programmes for street children because of severe financial restraints imposed on all government ministries by the Ministry of Finance under 'adjustment policies' required by the International Monetary Fund.

And that's it in a nutshell. In the last analysis it's the World Bank which sends these children out to scavenge on waste dumps and to die on the filthy streets of overcrowded cities.

Protecting Working Children belongs within a vast library of writings about poverty and the Third World. You could call it the world's biggest library of immoral books but if you did most people would look at you as if you'd gone slightly mad. In the community of rich nations there's a 'proper' way to receive publications which document the poverty of other nations - and it doesn't involve much looking at fundamentals.

Throughout the eighties more children than ever have had to work to support themselves. As some of the writers here are honest enough to acknowledge, it's the children and their families who will change things, irrespective of

the findings and well-intentioned advice of experts.

Compared to **Protecting Working Children**, the film **Mwe Bana Bandi**, made by Finns Kristiina Tuura and Paivi Takala, seems astonishingly gentle and simple. It takes the viewer through the daylight hours of a Zambian village, Wapamesa, in the company of its younger children. There is no commentary and no pedagogy. Just the dust and sunshine of a village where life is lived mainly outside and where the sound of children's songs is as common as the squawk of the chickens and the buzzing of insects. The makers called the film a "musical documentary about the songs and dances of the children in a Zambian village". It's actually much more than that: the picture of a communal way of life in which music and dancing are a natural part of living. Maybe it does present an over-idealised image of the village - the teenagers who simply stand at a distance and observe the camera might tell a different story from the one we see here. But for the younger children it does look as though there is plenty to sing and dance about. This is the sort of film which should be in every school video library.

The publication of the Scottish Child and Family Alliance (SCAFA)'s conference report **Childcare in Rural Communities** is a reminder of how far we have moved in Scotland from the kind of integrated community care visible at every turn in an African village. The report which calls for more and better pre-school resources in rural areas, costs £7.50. It should find its way into local authority departments, universities and colleges. It is doubtful, however, whether its readership will extend much wider because of peoples' understandable reluctance to grapple with tables of figures and a dry summary of conference findings which make so little concession to the casually interested lay person. And that's a shame - because much is needed to be done to improve the lot of children living in rural Scotland. ■

A Rough Guide to the Children's Hearing System

The Scottish Children's Hearing System is twenty years old this year - but many people still have only a sketchy idea of what it's all about. Here **Alan Miller** looks at the principles underlying the Children's Hearing System - and how it actually works.

The Origins of the Hearing System

It was the Kilbrandon Commission Report of 1964 that laid down the key principles on which the Children's Hearing System is based. The background to the appointment of the Kilbrandon Commission was one of patchy juvenile justice reform which had failed to deal adequately with children in difficulty. The Commission broke new ground by refuting the idea that a philosophy of welfare and treatment was compatible with the demands of a court process. Freed from the existing court model of juvenile justice, the Commission was able to offer an entirely new system explicitly based on identified key principles:

- All children in trouble should be dealt with in a unified system, whether coming to attention through their own offensive behaviour or through being offended against.
- The system should aim to identify the needs of the child or family and provide support and intervention where needed. The aim of the system should not be to punish.
- The system should work with underlying difficulties facing children and families rather than just react to presenting problems as they arise. This would require preventative work and allow for diversion from formal proceedings at the discretion of an independent 'Reporter'.

- Where formal proceedings were considered necessary, ordinary members of the community should be involved in making decisions about the children involved. These community members, duly selected, would form the Children's Panel for the area.

- The system should be as informal and flexible as possible, while paying due regard to the rights of children and parents. Legal formalities should be kept to a minimum, with no rigidly prescribed framework for dealing with individual cases.

- There should be a residual role for the Courts in deciding on disputed facts in cases brought before the Panel; considering appeals; and providing for prosecution of children in exceptional cases involving very serious crimes.

Referring Children to the System

Anyone can refer any child to the Reporter, who operates independently of other agencies such as the Social Work Department or the Police. The vast majority of children who commit offences are in fact referred to the Reporter. However a child can be referred for a whole number of other reasons such as unjustified absence from school, suffering from lack of parental care, child abuse, being outwith parental control or being in moral danger.

The basis for the referral is that the child *may* need 'compulsory measures of care'. It is up to the Reporter to assess whether there are sufficient 'grounds for referral' - essentially a legal test of what evidence is available. But equally important is the social test - does the child appear to need protection, guidance or treatment beyond what is already available to him or her, and if so how should that be provided?

The Reporter is responsible for assessing each referral. This usually involves obtaining reports from agencies like the Social Work Department, school, health visitors or - where it is thought necessary and the parents agree - a child psychologist or other specialist. Often the Reporter will write to parents to keep them informed, offering them a chance to discuss the situation.

Emergency referrals occur when a child is detained in a place of safety or held in police custody. In these

cases the time available for assessment is extremely limited - the Reporter must either authorise the child's release or bring his case to a Children's Hearing within a few days.

Only 40% of cases referred to Reporters result in a child attending the formal proceedings of a Children's Hearing. In the majority of cases the Reporter decides either to take no formal action or to refer the child and family to the Social Work Department for voluntary advice and assistance. The Reporter will refer a child's case to a Hearing only if he thinks there is enough evidence to prove one of the grounds for referral and that the child needs protection, guidance or treatment to be provided on a legally binding basis. Children can only come before a hearing by decision of the Reporter.

The Children's Hearing

A Children's Hearing consists of three members of the Children's Panel for that area sitting in rotation to consider cases referred by the Reporter. Children's panel members are lay people, selected for their interest in, and understanding of, problems faced by children and young people in trouble. Induction courses and in-service training are provided for panel members, but panel membership is essentially voluntary, unpaid and part-time. A local independent Children's Panel Advisory Committee oversees selection and monitoring of members.

A hearing is normally attended by the three panel members, the child, the parents and the social worker who prepared the report on the child - the child and parents may also each bring a representative or friend. The Reporter is present to act as legal adviser to the hearing and clerk of the proceedings. Other relevant professionals are sometimes asked to attend as long as numbers don't inhibit open and full discussion. Hearings are held in private, although the media may report the proceedings on the basis of anonymity. Sometimes the hearing can proceed in the absence of the child if it is considered that it would be detrimental to the child's interests to be present, or if his or her presence is not necessary (usually on account of the child's age).

Before the hearing starts, the child and parents - as well as the panel members - will have received a

copy of the Reporter's formal statement of the grounds, and supporting facts, for bringing the child's case to a hearing. At the beginning of the hearing the panel members must establish whether the child and parents understand and accept the Reporter's statement of the grounds for the hearing. If they do not, the hearing must either discharge the case immediately or ask the Reporter to take the disputed facts before a Sheriff so that he can hear evidence on them. The hearing can only continue once the grounds of the referral are either accepted by the child and parents or judicially established to a Sheriff's satisfaction.

Once the grounds have been accepted or established, the hearing can go on to discuss the child's case with those present. Panel members need to be able to create an open and supportive atmosphere for discussion, sometimes of distressing background information, so that the hearing can confront the issues clearly and sensitively. While keeping this sense of open-ended informality, the hearing must ensure that specific procedural rules are not forgotten as it moves from discussion of the issues to a decision - and stating the reasons for that decision - without the benefit of a break for reflection by panel members.

The Hearing's Decision

The hearing has two options when it makes its decision - to discharge the case or to make the child subject to a supervision order. This may seem a stark choice, but in fact the supervision requirement is a highly elastic instrument.

In most cases the child will stay at home - but a supervision requirement can direct that a child should live away from home, perhaps in a foster home or residential centre. The supervision order can incorporate other conditions relating to the child's welfare such as school attendance, access arrangements, health checks or any other matters that the hearing considers should be regulated in the child's interests. About 70% of cases brought before hearings result in a supervision requirement being made: in recent years about two-thirds of children subject to such supervision have stayed at home while the remaining one-third have been placed in alternative families or residential care.

Before coming to a final decision, hearings have the power to adjourn the case for further information and to require a child to be held in care temporarily, if considered necessary. Use of these powers is most likely to be considered in cases where a child has come to a hearing following detention in a place of safety or in police custody. The child or parent can appeal to a Sheriff against such temporary detention or any other decision made by a hearing. A further appeal can be taken to the Court of Session on a point of law.

Social Work Departments are responsible for giving effect to a supervision requirement or any temporary order the hearing decides on. This, and the Social Work Department's obligation to provide a background report on any child coming to a hearing, explains the important role played by the social worker in the hearing process.

A decision to make a supervision requirement is not a once-and-for-all decision. Within a year, a further hearing must take place to review the progress of the supervision and to decide whether to continue, change or stop it. The review hearing can be held much earlier if required by the Social Work Department, parent or child. Children who are under formal supervision when they turn sixteen can be retained on supervision up to their eighteenth birthday - but in practice most young people leave formal supervision well before then.

The System's Strengths

So does the system work? Certainly the juvenile crime wave predicted by some when the system was introduced has never come to pass. And the fact that the system has survived, despite much initial opposition, and become so established within so short a time, points to some strengths.

Firstly, the Hearing System is very much based on the time-honoured Scottish approach of applying enlightened common sense to first principles, albeit with an eye to developments elsewhere. The language of Kilbrandon is the language of sound common sense rather than of any professional ideology. There is an inevitable tension between welfare and justice, but it is a creative one.

Secondly, the system is built on a positive evaluation of the influence of the family and community. The central focus of any hearing is the child involved, but the child's environment and circumstances are far from ignored. The system aims to harness the strengths of the family and community in the interests of their younger members - the whole process is one of people dealing with people.

Thirdly, the system is able to be flexible and informal, allowing discussion to take place in a way that acknowledges the dignity and needs of each child and family. Processes can be tailor-made and can work speedily and effectively. While there is always a danger that flexibility will lead to inconsistent practice or evasion of disagreements, it is hard to imagine a system based on detailed rules intended to cover all eventualities which can so often achieve its high aims in a humane way.

Looking to the Future

The Hearing System is always developing and growing to meet changing needs. The Kilbrandon Report made no reference to physical, emotional or sexual abuse - but in the last ten years referrals to Reporters for alleged child abuse have increased from 900 (1980) to 5,300 (1989). It is a testament to Kilbrandon's approach - flexible practice based on sound principle - that the system has coped so well with this sort of change.

What, then, for the future? The system needs to use its formal processes to listen to and empower the socially marginalised - above all children. At the same time there must be a realistic recognition that major social problems cannot be resolved through individual intervention, however well carried out. There is scope for working more closely with the criminal justice system in relation to older teenage offenders and in cases of child abuse involving adult offenders and child victims. The system must be able to steer a course that is not determined by occasional extremes of media coverage. By building on its strengths, and being honest about its limitations, the Children's Hearing System will hopefully seem just as fresh and applicable a model for juvenile justice in twenty years time as it does today. ■

among the contributors in this issue...

Alison Bell is a member of **Scottish Child's** editorial group.

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Football - No Place for Racists



Stefan J Malaszek

Dear Editor,

It is well known that children are at their most lively and animated when discussing one topic - football. Football, the game that can seriously divide families yet also have the power to bring together supporters in solidarity, as happened after the Hillsborough disaster. There's many the time I've got into a fight in the school playground whilst discussing the merits of certain Edinburgh teams; but at least the fight wasn't over the colour of a player's skin as is happening now all over Scotland.

Through attending Hearts matches home and away for eight years I can safely say that while much of

the so-called 'casual' hooligan problem has been eradicated, a new breed of racist supporter is trying to kick down the dressing room door. Young children attending matches are clearly affected by seeing older supporters hurling racist abuse, and bananas, at anyone who isn't white. This type of behaviour has a danger of becoming the norm for football grounds although there is hope in the shape of an organisation called S.C.A.R.F. (Supporters' Campaign Against Racism in Football) who organise against elements such as the B.N.P., the neo-Nazi party who try to recruit outside some football grounds.

Where does this leave the kids? They are vulnerable when it comes

to such matters as racism, where they may feel under pressure to join in the name-calling and abuse. In later life they could easily progress to serious racial attacks or just have a heavy intolerance where 'aliens' are concerned. One such incident which highlights this happened in 1988 when Mark Walters, Rangers' first black player, played at Tynecastle. What followed was the most vicious verbal assault ever witnessed at Tynecastle on one single player. The flashpoint arrived late in the second half when Walters took a corner in from of the infamous 'shed' where most supporters congregate. You could not see the ball for the incessant shower of coins, bananas and spit that rained down on the player. Most Hearts

fans were disgusted, but some kids no older than five or six joined in the abuse - after all, no-one was going to stop them, were they?

What young football supporters need now is education against the ideas being instilled on the terracing. There are avenues to do this through such as the junior clubs of all league clubs (Hearts have 8,500 young members).

Young children are tomorrow's supporters and it is to them we must look if attitudes are to change in what is the greatest game on earth. What a pity the Nazis are trying to ruin it all.

Mark Bain

School Closure Threat

Dear Editor,

Primary school education in east central Edinburgh is the subject of a so-called consultation paper put out by Lothian Region's Education Committee. The preferred option seems to be to close my son's school, London Street Primary, and move St Mary's R.C. into its building. London Street Primary would then be merged with another school almost three-quarters of a mile away.

Parents at London Street Primary School have formed an action committee to try and save the school which is noted for its high academic standards, multi-cultural ethos and community support and involvement. Councillor Elizabeth McGinnis, chair of the Education Committee, has said that London Street is a luxury the Region cannot afford in the face of Tory cuts. The action committee sees this as playing politics with our children's education.

Councillor McGinnis has also said that the fact that StMary's is a Catholic school is irrelevant. This is disingenous. Given that there is supposedly a commitment to a multi-cultural society within the Labour Party, the merging of St Mary's with London Street should have at least been considered. The legal requirement to provide separate education for Roman Catholic children is a nettle no politician seems prepared to grasp. London Street has Episcopalian, Jewish, Muslim, Presbyterian and Sikh children on its roll.

A closed primary school will never re-open and what does that do for the prospects of families living in central Edinburgh in the future? We have all seen the extent of urban blight ghettoisation that can so easily occur in inner cities - shutting schools is a step in that direction. For further information I can be contacted at my address.

Stuart McHardy
52 Brunswick Street
Edinburgh EH7 5HY

Brazil Street Children

Dear Editor,

I was pleased to see **Scottish Child** highlight the plight of Brazil's street children in your last issue (Aug/Sept 1991). The double standards applied to children and young people seems to be a disturbing, global phenomenon, with children being simultaneously idealised and appallingly exploited

I was particularly glad that you chose to make the links between the fate of Brazil's urchins and the situation facing thousands of homeless teenagers in Scotland. It is a sad fact that many people in Scotland are more aware of and more sympathetic to the orphans of Rio than to the youngsters on their own doorsteps with no home to go to. **Scottish Child** does us all a service by drawing attention to the scandal of homeless, unprotected youngsters, wherever they are.

At Scottish Education and Action for Development (SEAD) we constantly seek out the links between Scotland and the Third World. Time and again, we find that there are many fundamental similarities between the experiences of people in Scotland and their counterparts in the Third World. This is particularly true of women throughout the world, as we are finding in our current programme of work on women organising in Scotland and in the Third World.

I hope that **Scottish Child** will carry further articles drawing attention to such similarities between Scotland and the Third World.

Linda Gray
SEAD Director

SCOTTISH CHILD
welcomes readers'
letters.
Please send them to

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POSTGRADUATE EDUCATION

Newcastle-upon-Tyne SYMPOSIA IN CHILD HEALTH

**NO 12: PERSPECTIVES IN SOCIAL
DISADVANTAGE AND CHILD HEALTH**

In Memory of Professor J.M. Parkin

Friday 29th and Saturday (a.m.) 30th November, 1991
In the Civic Centre, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne

Topics to Include:-

- *An Overview - Medical and Social Aspects
- *The Community's Perspective - Parent and Community
Epidemiology
- *Action for Social Disadvantage - Six Case Studies ;
Continuities of Disadvantage
- *The Wider Perspective - Legal, Paediatric and European
- *The Action Plan

Registration Fee £17.50 (including refreshments & lunch both days)

For full details and Application Forms apply:-

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University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne
The Medical School, Framlington Place
Newcastle-upon-Tyne. NE2 4HH
Telephone No: 091 - 222 - 6264

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Seeing New Things



I've been really busy lately. Doing and seeing lots of things, meeting new people. It's been so good talking to people who know nothing about me, Edinburgh, my world. Sometimes I feel like a child grasping for new information, enriched with other people's happiness, interests, thoughts. While I'm feeling and thinking about the immediate things around me I am also aware that where I live is just a house in a town, just another place. I know that the bad things happening to me *will* pass. Sometimes I get so excited about all the possibilities in the world. There's a railway track outside my flat.

I went to the Greenpeace Walk for the Whales with my friend Lucy and her son Danny. He's two and a half. It felt good - not really fun, but a lot of positive energy and action. I noticed how children make gatherings of people complete, breaking barriers with their simple fun and clear emotions. I love watching contact between strangers and children - my son Samuel always ends up talking to new people while I look on.

I got caught in *real* rain today. The kind of rain you remember from when you're a kid, unstoppable, pelting faster and faster until you laugh clear laughter, your nose dripping, your skin bright and pink.

We went to the Modern Art Gallery. Sam loved it. I didn't get much of a chance to look at the stuff there as Sam was too busy

running to and from the various rooms demanding acknowledgement from passers-by. He made friends with the guards, they talked to him.

Today I went down to a hostel where some of my friends stay. God, it's a depressing place. Desperate, pleading, crying, shouting, male. Sometimes it's okay. Danny and Samuel were jumping up and down putting the balls from the snooker table into the pockets as fast as we were retrieving them then placing them back on the ripped felt.

I went with some friends for a drive out to the borders today, to a reservoir. It was a quiet drive, me and Samuel in the back, a mother and child with sleepy china faces. I had a good moan to a friend, I felt I really needed it. The hills looked really silent from the car as we drove back, everything gradually getting darker.

It's my birthday today! I got a purple woolly hat, two books, two postcards, a bottle of wine, a wee frog, four birthday cards, a wall clock, a grin from Lucy, a tape and a poetry map of Edinburgh. It's the best birthday I've ever had. I took Samuel down to the Stockbridge Festival. It was pretty small and encased by wire fencing. Not ideal for kids at all, so it was basically in and out. I bought Sam a huge yellow balloon, so we got that out of it. He loved that and I got to listen to the Cocteau Twins - I really love them.

This morning Samuel threw a toy down the toilet and blocked it. I tried to get it out but I couldn't. Crisis, I thought - a crisis loan for a plumber from the Dole! In the end I got on to the landlord, who agreed he'd pay for a plumber. No hassle.

I've just spent the weekend at Traquair for the fair. I was a bit disappointed as it was pretty expensive and a bit contrived and artificial. I think I was maybe

looking for something different, a festival rather than a fair, a chance to get away from things a bit. Camping there was brilliant. Samuel really enjoyed himself, running about in the sun, seeing new things. I spent a warm and beautiful night under the stars, and in the morning we drove back through endless sky, water, trees,

'I noticed how children make gatherings of people complete, breaking barriers with their simple fun and clear emotions'

hills. I noticed the colours in the country, the lack of greyness, things I just don't notice in Edinburgh.

It's so good getting the chance to get away sometimes, to just get a day or maybe two when I can go away with friends and just have a change - I can see it's good for Samuel too. I suppose I'm lucky having the chance. A lot of people don't.

When I get back to Edinburgh everything's the same, except there seem to be more people with money all over the place. Lots of young people. Today the Housing Benefit Investigation Department sent two folk around. They'd received an anonymous letter about my claim and had to see if the allegations were true. They

weren't. You wonder how many people get claims held up for things like that, because spiteful people write anonymous letters with lies in them and these investigation people 'have to take the allegations seriously'? I mean, if I wrote an anonymous letter saying John Major was fiddling his tax return would they 'have' to take that allegation seriously? I doubt it.

Today was brilliant. I went horse riding at the Bridges Project. I got a horse called Morag. The girl from the stables kept urging me to kick her to move but I couldn't. "She won't feel it", she kept shouting. I could feel it though.

I've been ill the past few days and could hardly get out my bed sometimes. What do you do when you're by yourself, you're ill and you've got a kid? I was lucky as a friend came round and looked after us both.

The great thing about being ill is that you get better - I had a great day the day I got better. We went along to the Mound, where all the buskers and musicians and all-sorts from the Festival do their stuff. Sam got his face painted, well in fact he actually ended up doing it himself. Lots of people took his photograph. I went to Princes Street Gardens to get away from all the noise and a French man asked if he could take Sam's photo. I asked him why and he said 'because he was beautiful'. He is.

The Festival makes Edinburgh very busy. I met a friend and we were going to go to the park where they have all the shows, but there were crowds everywhere and the traffic was awful. So we just drove out of Edinburgh, south. We went as far as England, and spent some time just sitting in a field there. Samuel has never been outside Scotland before. The sky was soothing and quiet, I noticed lots and lots of sky. Samuel noticed it too. Lots of sky is important.

Anna Fawkes

third birthday appeal

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