Scottish Child

November/ December 1995

£2.55

ISSN 0950-4176

Suicidal Children
Recognise the symptoms

Howard's way
Bars & Brutality

In at the Deep End
Men who work with kids

Scottish Child

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Scottish Child Limited is a non-profitmaking co-operative which publishes Scottish Child magazine and organises conferences and events to promote a greater understanding of the importance of children and childhood in society.

ISSN 0950-4176

Letters and articles to
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28 Gillespie Crescent,
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Telephone: 0131 221 9591
Subscriptions: 0131 557 0799

Subscriptions: UK Annual Rates - individuals £15.00; organisations - £25.00. Cheques should be made payable to Scottish Child.
Overseas airmail: individuals - Europe £25.00; rest of the world £30.00; organisations - all countries £37.00.
Overseas subscriptions are payable by sterling international money order or banker's draft.

Production:
Cover Photo: Geoffrey Craig
Camera: Edinburgh Make-up Services
Printing: Allander Litho

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BASPCAN

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Deadline for submission of abstracts - **1 November 1996**
Notification of acceptance -**1 March 1997**

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editorial

Towards a new Kilbrandon

There has been much in the papers and on the television news recently about Michael Howard's proposals for sending children to prison. Specially built, privately run jails are to be erected in England to cater specifically for offenders too young to be sent to conventional Young Offenders' Institutions and prisons, and in this issue we carry an article - 'Banged Up - Beaten Up' by Mike Grewcock of the Howard League - on just this subject.

But what of Scotland? As yet there are no proposals to build children's prisons up here. But do we really have anything to be proud of?

Last month a 14-year-old Glasgow girl was given a life sentence for the part she played in the allegedly homophobic murder of Michael Doran. The case is now going to appeal, but in the meantime the young girl is locked up in a secure unit at Kenmure St Mary's School, Bishopbriggs. If the **Daily Record** is to be believed, the girl doesn't yet understand the nature of the sentence she has been given, and asks her mother to find out when she will be going on outings with the other children resident at Kenmure St Mary's. The answer is she won't. She will stay at Kenmure until she is old enough to go to Her Majesty's Prison Cornton Vale.

This is not an isolated case. Every so often in Scotland there is a playground stabbing, a neighbourhood vendetta or some apparently random act of violence that ends up with a minor being placed behind bars for a very long time. While most minors who commit offences in Scotland are dealt with by the Children's Hearing System - at which they are likely to get a more sympathetic hearing than in court - it is up to the Procurator Fiscal to decide whether individual cases should be dealt with by the courts or the Panel. Once a case reaches court the sentences can, as we have seen, be every bit as draconian as sentences passed down south.

If we are living in a humane society - and there are many reasons to question this - surely it is wrong to put people behind bars for deeds they did, mistakes they made, while they were in their teens, or younger. Surely there must be a better way of dealing with this problem. Surely, in any case, it is society which is at fault rather than the individual and surely it is society which has to change. I do not believe babies are born with evil in their hearts and if youngsters - or older people - commit evil and despicable crimes the blame (at least in the vast majority of cases) will lie somewhere in their childhood.

So what do we do about this? Locking youngsters up for years on end is surely no solution to the problem. Imprisonment is notorious for its failings. The re-offending rate is very high and the chances are that by locking known offenders up in one place together we may be encouraging crime rather than discouraging it. If someone is a danger to the public there may be a good reason for keeping them away from others until they are no longer a danger. But this is not the way prison works: it is for punishment, not rehabilitation.

Community service is another option, but openings for this are chronically short and it seems that there is more political will in government circles for spending money on building prisons than for spending it on organising community service. Anyway, by itself community service could not be the solution. Like prison it is mainly for retribution and lacks a formal rehabilitative element.

What we may need is some kind of coming-together of resources whereby intensive psychological counselling is combined with community service and secure accommodation for as long as is necessary to rehabilitate the young person. Perhaps it could also serve as a model for the rehabilitation of older offenders.

What is probably necessary, as Kilbrandon reaches its 25th anniversary, is for the government to set up a commission - probably a Royal Commission - to investigate more humane and successful ways of dealing with youngsters who commit serious offences. Unfortunately with the present government this seems increasingly unlikely ■

in brief

Young carers

There is a small - or not so small - army of children who look after their sick or otherwise disabled parents. They are known as 'young carers' and, as we have described in previous articles within **Scottish Child**, some of them take on care responsibilities even before they get to primary school.

Earlier this year VOCAL (Voice of Carers Across Lothian), appointed a worker to concentrate on educating people about this group of children and to try to identify more of them and help them devise means of lightening their load. There are other projects elsewhere in Scotland but as yet nothing like the growth in support groups that exists south of the border.

We therefore welcome the latest publication on this topic, produced by Children in Scotland, with the sponsorship of **Community Care** magazine and the Carers National Association.

The main focus of the booklet is on the special problems of children who care in families where there are parents with HIV. You don't really have to think about the issue for long to realise that such children must suffer a whole set of additional problems to those already experienced by 'ordinary' young carers. They have to contend with the knowledge that if the HIV status of their parents becomes known, it is likely to affect their own relationships with friends, with school and with the locality in which they live - almost certainly for the worse.

In addition people with the AIDS virus receive most of their medical care at home, only going into hospital or hospice at times of crisis or when the end is near. Young carers have to dispense medicine and support to adults who may well wish to deny the fact of their HIV status to themselves, as well as to the world at large.

We urge you to get hold of this booklet. The only negative comment our readers found to make about it was the most unattractive red print the publishers have used for the text.

Young Carers and HIV, written by Heidi Alexander; published by Children in Scotland price £2.50.

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First steps in Musselburgh

Years ago Lothian Region put a lot of effort into getting the helping agencies to work more co-operatively together. The report which came out of that time was called 'Crossing the Boundaries'.

Since that time it has become much more commonplace for agencies to think across their own institutional boundaries but the practice of working co-operatively still struggles to establish itself in many places. There are many more examples of 'good practice' however and we've just been looking at the annual report of **First Step**, a community managed project for under fives, based in Musselburgh.

First Step was started by local parents and parents still play an active part in managing the project. It has put more than one adult on the road to new educational and employment opportunities and brought creative play into the lives of hundreds of children who might otherwise have missed out.

There is a huge waiting list for places in what is currently an Urban Aid funded resource. The money from that programme runs out in a year's time and the workers are already gearing up to persuade the local authority that they should come under the local government umbrella so as to maintain a facility which has brought measurable benefits to its community.

First Step is based at 37 Galt Avenue, Musselburgh. Tel: 0131-665 0848.

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The drop out society

Think of the North East of England and you probably think of a football team, or an ale in a distinctive brown bottle... Newcastle and its surrounding towns is another employment casualty of the Eighties and the closure of the shipyards. Thousands of adult men have seen their chances of work evaporate with the shift away from heavy industry. But, more worryingly even, so have thousands of kids. Some of them have perhaps been lucky enough to be drafted into the Japanese high-tech companies which have been persuaded to locate in and around the Newcastle area by the promise of huge tax and other benefits from the Department of Trade.

What the work of Clive Wilkinson has shown however, is that with the loss of the traditional apprenticeship route into work, vast numbers of kids just 'disappear' from the age of 12 or 13 onwards. They drop out of school. They never get on to work or training programmes. They may be perfectly visible, hanging around on the estates and schemes but they have ceased to 'belong' to anything other than their little local group or gang.

Wilkinson estimates that there could be as many as 100,000 teenagers in this situation and he warns that there is an urgent need to find more and better ways of integrating them into civil society, if we do not wish them to take matters into their own hands and find less acceptable ways of making themselves a living.

Wilkinson's book, **The Drop Out Society: Young People on the Margin,** is based on work he did with teenagers on the estates round Sunderland. It is published by National Youth Agency, price £12.50.

The National Youth Agency is at 17-23 Albion Street, Leicester LE1 6GD.

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Motorway protests

When the then Glasgow Corporation allowed the M8 motorway to bulldoze its way through the heart of Glasgow, they allowed road transport to take precedence over much that was dear to the citizens of Glasgow, particularly the Victorian buildings of Charing Cross. You would have thought they would have learned their lesson. Apparently not.

Protests are currently being planned against the extension to the M74 motorway - the main road south from Glasgow to the English border - which is going to drive through communities in the south of Glasgow, destroying 17 listed buildings and 40 other buildings, accounting for a grand total of 200 households.

Activists are now planning a series of demonstrations against the new extension, which will link the existing M74 to the southern end of the Kingston Bridge, thus taking much of the traffic off the M8 itself.

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Human warehouses

Prisons and crime are rarely out of the news. From the sensationalism of the O J trial to the salacious coverage of the Rosemary West case, the press provides a steady diet of scandal and titillation to keep its readers 'happy'. SACRO, the organisation which works with ex-offenders,

has a hard task to interest the public in the real debate about crime and punishment. At their annual general meeting in October Chief Executive, John McNeill called once again for a greater funding of alternatives to custody and a more enlightened attitude to the use of bail for those on remand.

Scotland still continues to send huge numbers of fine defaulters and minor offenders to prison and the quality of life for both prisoners and officers in the overcrowding that results from this kind of sentencing means that jails become mere human warehouses, full of under-exercised, bored young men who come back out into the community with more contacts of the wrong sort, more anger at the system and fewer chances than before of breaking the cycle of 'crime and time'.

SACRO Mediation Projects reports 74 per cent satisfaction for all parties in cases where neighbours and/or tenants are in dispute. Other mediation and reparation projects are run in Aberdeen and Motherwell/Hamilton. They are expanding their services all over the country: a supported accommodation project in Inverness, a community mediation project in Edinburgh, and an Orkney resource project based in Kirkwall.

SACRO head office is based at 31 Palmerston Place, Edinburgh EH12 5AP; Tel: 0131 226 4222.

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Child protection conference

News of a major conference on child protection in 1997. BASPCAN will be bringing their Third annual Congress to Scotland, to the Heriot Watt University in July 1997. People wanting to present papers at this event have until November 1996 to get their abstracts in and accepted.

Contact: BASPCAN, 10 Priory Street, York YO1 1EZ. Tel: 01904 613605.

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Scotland, Sri Lanka, South Africa

And, casting your conference net a little wider, there's another one that may interest you: the SEAD conference (Scottish Education for Action and Development), in Stirling on 25 November. The title of the day is 'A View of Development: Shifting the Balance in Scotland, Sri Lanka and South Africa'.

The contact person at SEAD is Averil Foulner on 0131 226 6384.

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World AIDS Day

World AIDS Day is fast approaching once more. **Positively Women** is holding a training course entitled 'Working with HIV Positive Mothers and Their Children'. It will be held in London 20-21 November and the information we received states that participants are expected to have 'a good basic knowledge of HIV/AIDS.'

Contact address: Positively Women, 5 Sebastian Street, London EC1V OHE. Tel: 0171 490 5501.

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AVERT alert

Even if you can't get to an event around 1st December, you may want to make evident your support for the fight against AIDS and the discrimination that goes with it. AVERT has a range of items for sale: red ribbons, balloons, stickers, enamel badges.

These are available from AVERT, 11-13 Denne Parade, Horsham, West Sussex RH12 1JD.

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Ayrshire consultation

One of the great mysteries of modern times is what exactly is going to happen when the new unitary authorities take over next April. How are services like Social Work and Housing going to be handed over and what effect will the handover have on millions of people who use these services. In fact, talking to people who work for the existing local authorities you might be forgiven for thinking no-one has much idea what is happening now, never mind what is or is not going to happen next April.

The new South Ayrshire Council, which from April 1996 will serve a population of over 110.000, may have the right idea. It is organising a series of public meetings throughout the area it will be serving to 'seek the views of local people on how the new council might best deliver its services and take account of local opinion.

What the council calls 'major consultative meetings' at Ayr, Prestwick, Troon, Maybole and Girvan, with 'smaller scale meetings' as far afield as Annbank, Ballantrae and Lendalfoot, Barr, Barrhill, Crosshill, Kirkmichael and Straiton, Colmonell, Coylton, Dailly, Dundonald and Loans, Dunure, Maidens and Kirkoswald, Minishant, Mossblown, Symington, Tarbolton and Craigie.

Among other things to be discussed will be pre-fives provision and school boards.

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Children & Separation

Bookings are still been taken for the Family Mediation conference on **The Impact of Divorce on Children**. The date is 6 December; the venue: the Royal British Hotel in Edinburgh.

To Book or for more information, contact Julie Morrison on 0131 220 1610.

Misquote

On the contents page of the August/September issue, we quoted Rosemary Gallagher of the Scottish Child Law Centre as saying: 'The system of which we are so proud is often looked upon by young people with fear and loathing'.

In fact, Rosemary Gallagher did not make such a statement.

The Scottish Child Law Centre has a policy of avoiding making sensationalist comments. Ms Gallagher is also unhappy about the title and graphic which we used. The choice of these was entirely the responsibility of **Scottish Child**.

We would like to apologise for any harm we have caused by wrongly attributing this statement to Ms Gallagher.

in *brief*

Suicidal

Dr R M Wrate analyses the reasons behind the increase in suicide and attempted suicide among children and adolescents.

Self-harming behaviour in children, and the much rarer suicide of a youngster, is extremely disturbing. Those immediately involved with such children are inevitably distressed, feeling powerless or guilty, having apparently failed in their obligation as adults to protect children. A measure of comfort can perhaps be taken from the fact that suicide and deliberate self-harm (parasuicide), though related, are nevertheless distinct: most children who kill themselves haved not made a previous attempt, and the vast majority of the thousands more who self-harm do not go on to later kill themselves. In most instances that has never been their intention.

Could better recognition of depression lessen the risk ? The presence of a depressed or unhappy mood is invariable, but few self-harming children are actually clinically depressed at the time of their parasuicidal act. Whilst adolescence is associated with a sudden increase in the prevalence of depressive symptoms (Graham & Rutter 1973; Zeitlin 1986), often undiagnosed (Cooper and Goodyer 1993; Goodyer and Cooper 1993), it will become apparent that preventing self-harm is most likely to be acheived by improving adults' relationships with children, in both the short- and the long-term, increasing their sensitivity to children's needs and helping them with emotional problem-solving - rather than by a medical campaign of detecting and treating depression.

This is not to deny the importance of recognising a clinical depression where one is present. It has been commonly missed in pre-pubertal children. As in older youngsters, untreated depression generally results in the child feeling increasingly hopeless, and suicidal thoughts are rarely absent. Whatever diagnostic type of depression is present, feelings of misery, social withdrawal, and loss of interest are felt, along with intermittent tearfulness, impaired concentration, lack of energy, irritability and sometimes loss of temper control.

Sleep is usually disturbed (either by waking repeatedly or sleeping excessively); a loss of appetite is common, and weight loss may occur. In other words, a significant impairment of daily function occurs, the observed depressed mood self-evidently the cause. Such a depressed mood as a response to some external stress is quite a common cause of minor depression, but the precipitating event may not be readily apparent. It may also be the consequence of repeated or chronic, ongoing, stress. Whatever the cause, if untreated a depressed mood with suicidal ideas is unlikely to spontaneously improve; instead, the risk of deliberate self-harm simply increases. Where a clinical depression is suspected, referral for a psychiatric opinion should always be sought.

Although a depressed mood plays a central role in parasuicidal behaviour, deliberate self-harm and suicide is far more complicated than simple depression. Even in quite severe cases of depression anti-depressants might be the only required intervention. It will be apparent from the accounts below that to deal effectively with self-harming behaviour, and minimise the risk of suicide, several different measures are generally required although formal psychiatric treatment proves necessary for comparatively few.

Some 20 years ago, David Shaffer's (1974) landmark study of children and adolescents who had commited suicide showed that its incidence was rare (one in 100,000 children aged 14 and under), although undoubtedly every death had been a grevious loss, and each media report of a further one leaves a widespread sense of shock and loss. With the benefit of a hindsight that parents would have dearly wished for in advance, Shaffer recognised that there had quite often been some forewarning, and evidence that some of the children had been very isolated or had been facing a painful loss (eg of a friendship, anticipated academic failure etc). Some had been high achievers, as apparently may often apply in Japan, but the majority had no record of past psychiatric care nor exibited symptoms so distinctive and memorable that, as a consequence of the suicide, one would not overlook the same risk in a child presenting similarly a few months later.

As in most studies of childhood suicide, boys outnumbered girls, but the reasons for this are unknown. An interpersonal conflict such as a 'disciplinary crisis' had preceded the suicide in some of the cases he examined, perhaps acting as a last straw. As such disciplinary events are a frequent daily occurrence in Scotland, however, the magnitude of that crisis from the youngster`s point of view could presumably escape the notice of the adults involved.

In other words, a retrospective examination might throw light on the unpredicted suicide, and may be very important in helping those involved come to terms with the death, but it does not necessarily prepare one much better to deflect a future suicide. Nonetheless, a detailed psychological 'autopsy' of these suicides is generally held to be important for the future care of vunerable youngsters, however uncomfortable that examination may be.

In this author's experiece, death or serious illness in the adolescent's immediate social environment sometimes seem to have acted as a catalyst, the anniversary of a significant loss or the birthday of a dead loved one etc, or there may have been discussion with a friend, perhaps themselves now dead, about suicide as an 'acceptable' outcome for the impossible viscissitudes life. Kurt Cobain's death is currently considered in this way by quite a large number of vunerable youngsters, which the **New Musical Express** has recognised in an imaginative and responsible way.

Although some deaths by suicide seem to have been unanticipated by the child - who may, for example, have been unaware of the toxicity of Paracetamol with the antidote-treatment consequently delayed too long - the means chosen more often leaves little chance of survival eg hanging or jumping. These two methods accounted for almost half the deaths of adolescents by suicide in Strathclyde over a recent 12 year period (Barton 1995).

Self-blame in survivors of a completed suicide is inevitable, whether parents, friends, teachers, or others, but its impossible to tell whether a professional intervention could have successfully forestalled a completed suicide. It is more easy to retrospectively identify, as Shaffer did, missed opportunities than to prevent a future suicide, but the vunerability/ situational factors described above offer a useful framework against which to compare whether one is taking a case sufficiently seriously. For example, there are a small number of very vunerable individuals who fluctuate in and out of high risk periods throughout a long period of professional contact; where it is unsafe to assume that past survival of

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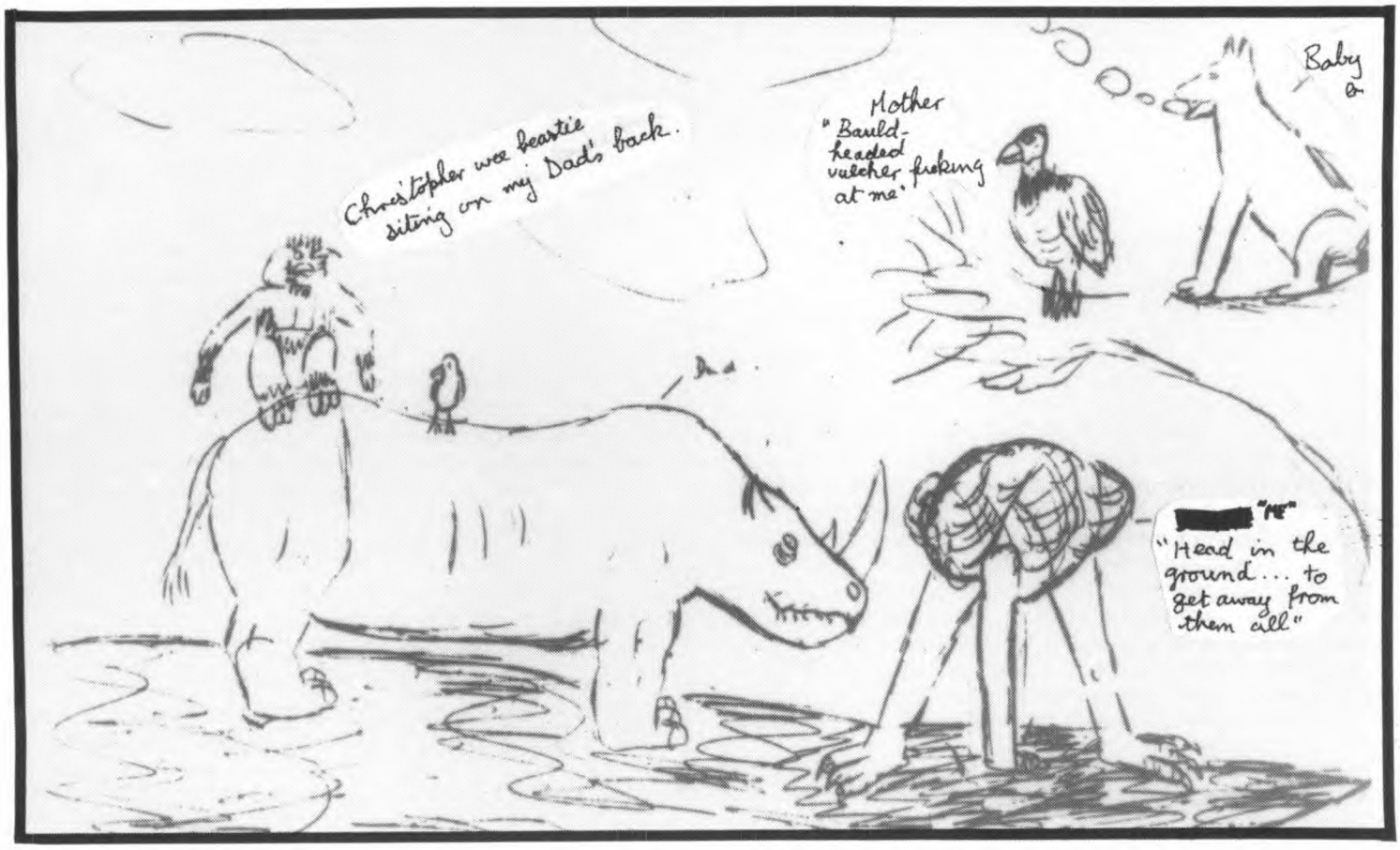
Tendencies



self-harm episodes guarantees that the present episode will be no more 'serious'.

Increasing adolescent male suicides in the UK have been reported in recent years (McClure 1994), and similar trends are evident in other Western countries. Targets for a reduction have been set. However, since these suicides seem to have a significant association with factors that are not readily amenable to professional (rather than socio-political) interventions - eg high unemployment, dislocated family ties, drug and alcohol abuse - early improvement in population suicide rates can be welcomed but hardly guaranteed. In the Strathclye study, vunerable unemployed older boys living at home seemed at particular risk - the suicide quite commonly followed an acute stress, under the influence of alcohol, most often over a weekend. Only a minority had made a previous attempt, and less than a third had past contact with psychiatric services (Barton 1995).

Perhaps because general lessons for professional prevention of child or adolescent suicide are difficult to determine with any certainty, most recent research has turned toward the evaluation of primary prevention - school-based educational projects, mostly in the United States (now being shown to be doubtfully effective), and research on the impact of a completed suicide on child and adolescent peers, their possible need for counselling in particular.

The last has two aims: to deal with the psychological trauma of the suicide, now recognised to be considerable, and to prevent repetition within the dead youngster's peer group (see, for example, the study of adolescent friends of suicide victims by Brent et al 1993a, 1993b). Establishing the opportunity for therapeutic contact with the survivors of an adolescent suicide seems most worthwhile but, except for the friends and other members of the dead adolescent's peer group, identifying other groups of high-risk individuals is difficult, and the practical aspects of ensuring their participation in a preventative programme seems equally formidable.

Take for example Barton's study. She identified 82 child or adolescent suicides in Strathclyde Region between1981and 1992. The majority were male (78 per cent), mostly from social class III-V (83 per cent - including all but one of the 16 girls), and in at least half there was no evidence at all that a psychiatric disorder had been present immediately before their suicide. Health care contact of any kind in the month before the suicide had been rare. Its difficult to know where one would begin.

For the adults involved with an adolescent who had recently killed themselves (over the period of study in Strathclyde there was no recorded case of a child suicide below the age of 10), some post-trauma counselling is important. This might, in the first instance, best take the form of a review some weeks later of what happened,including:

- the circumstances leading up to the suicide
- evidence of vunerability and suicide risk
- how the suicide was discovered
- where the youngster's significant others were and how they were told
- how the immediate aftermath was dealt with
- how those most immediately involved were supported etc
- ensuring that all those involved have an opportunity to participate in the review and voice their experience
- without blaming, having the courage to acknowledge any clear lessons.

Parasuicide is a much more widespread phenomenon, which increases during the adolescent years, with up to six or more teenage hospital

Suicidal Tendencies

admissions *each day* in a city the size of Glasgow, generally following deliberate self-poisoning. In the United States such frequency has caused sufficient concern to have led to the development of preventative programmes in High Schools (Shaffer et al 1988). **The Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry** alone has published more than 30 scientific papers on child/adolescent parasuicide over the last 30 months. These have recently included papers on psychosocial risk factors identifiable from childhood (Reinherz, Giaconia, Silverman et al 1995), another from New Zealand on the social circumstances and adjustment since infancy of adolescents who have made parasuicide attempts (Fergusson and Lynskey 1995), and one from Holland on adolescents' own views of their parasuicide (Keinhorst, De Wilde, and Dickstra 1995).

In Scotland, concern about possible 'contagion' in parasuicidal behaviour is most readily experienced by those responsible for the care of adolescent in-patients, or of deprived or disadvantaged youngsters in residential settings, where in the course of a week or so, several different adolescents from the same establishment may be admitted to hospital for the treatment of a deliberate overdose.

Parasuicide is much more common amongst girls than boys, a reversal of the ratio for completed suicide. Other features of adolescent parasuicide have become well recognised (Hawton 1986, Shaffer et al 1988). These may be roughly divided into:

- factors concerned with individual characteristics of the adolescent
- the adolescent's family and environmental characteristics
- triggering events.

The assessment of a youngster following a parasuide should encompass these three domains. For example, in relation to environmental factors, studies in Edinburgh have demonstrated the importance of such social factors as youthful marriage (Kreitman & Schreiber 1979), perhaps to unsuitable or abusive partners, and long-term unemployment of the adolescent or within their family (eg Platt & Kreitman 1985). The strong association repeatedly found between unemployment and parasuicide might be due to the unemployed adolescent's vulnerability to stressful events being increased because of feelings of hopelessness and loss of self-esteem engendered by their long-term unemployment.

Other factors might exaggerate or diminish this possible effect of unemployment. For example, the clustering of such environmental stresses as family break-up, chronic family ill-health, academic under-achievement, relationship difficulties and interpersonal conflict, and their accumulative adverse effect upon an individual's resilience. The same Edinburgh researchers have shown that these factors, especially in the presence of drug and alcohol abuse, tend to predict those who repeatedly self-harm, a small proportion of whom do finally kill themselves, although perhaps not always intentionally. The substance abuse may accelerate a downward social spiral and, by disinhibiting the youngster, increase the likelihood of impulsive acts.

Certainly, no psychiatric diagnosis has been found to be particularly predictive of adolescent parasuicide. In most instances, no psychiatric symptoms of any kind had been present, although the youngster had undoubtedly been distressed. .Indeed, much the most convincing explanation for the preponderance of girls is that most acts of self-harm appear to have been triggered by anger or frustration in young women experiencing inter-personal conflict. They then respond to the social taboo on girls getting angry - or effectively assertive - by displacing their anger on to themselves, in some instances their parasuicide-victim role sadly proving more influential than all previous more direct confrontations.

When reviewing the circumstances of a self-harm episode, it should be remembered that the presence of some depressive symptoms is invariable but these are not necessarily evidence of a clinical depression. To illustrate the point further, conduct disorders, characterised by the repeated tendency toward inter-personal conflict, have been found to be more often associated with adolescent parasuicide than major depressive illness. On examination, the act of self-harm most often proves to have been a maladaptive attempt to deal with a particular stress, often impulsively considered, the youngster being deficient in alternative problem solving and thus at a loss to escape the stress..

The family picture printed alongside this article (page 9) illustrates this well: it was drawn by a 12 year old boy who four years later presented with a deliberate Paracetamol overdose. At 12 he portrayed himself as an ostrich, poorly understood by his father, whom he obviously felt openly favoured his younger brother. Otherwise he was rather separate from the males of the family. His mother was a vulture pecking at him.

This boy's mother and sister left the family two years before the overdose, which took place in association with his 16th birthday when his father had threatened to throw him out if he didn't sign on - he got out of bed too late and found that the Social Security office had shut for the night. On meeting him it was clear that, although not suffering from a clinical depression, he was certainly depressed and feeling hopeless about his future.

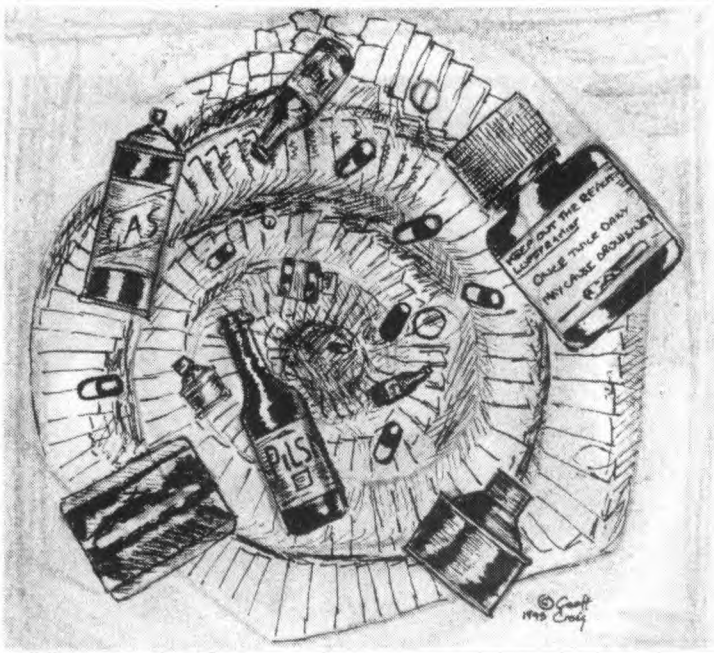
Hawton has undertaken research in Oxford similar to that in Edinburgh (Hawton et al 1982). He offers a simple classification of adolescent parasuicides that is recommended when assessing risk of a further parasuicde. Many fall into one of two categories, both containing essentially normal youngsters who differ only in whether they had been

What to look out for

Mack & Hickler's (1981) moving account of the life and eventual death of a 14-year-old girl called Vivienne provides readers with much food for thought. Based on experience such as this, and published accounts elsewhere, Mack elsewhere suggests eight possible factors any of which may combine to influence a child or adolescent towards suicide (Mack 1986). These are worthwhile bearing in mind when one experiences qualms of anxiety about a particular child.

- Individual, presumably constitutional, factors producing a predisposition towards depressive moods, whose precipitants are not necessarily obvious (a family history of similar vunerability may be present).
- The actual presence of a profoundly depressed mood, presumably insufficiently recognized or inadequately treated.
- Early life experience, especially loss of an important relationship, increasing the youngster's sensitivity to later loss.
- Personality factors, in particular a combination of very vulnerable self-esteem and high ideals, so that hopes of personal accomplishment are impossible to fulfil, the youngster apparently constantly feeling inadequate and thus unable to readily bounce back from disappointments and hurts.
- In combination with this, to compensate for their poor self-worth, certain relationships with friends or significant adults may become over-important and any loss of these may have a devastating effect.
- In the weeks or months preceding the suicide, a new or increasing preoccupation with themes about death was sometimes evident.
- At the time of the suicide, there may have been heightened public concern about some serious social issuue, for example a social injustice, newly reported famine etc, which seemed to have particularly affected the youngster.
- Finally, some precipitating factor in the youngster's immediate social world (eg an impending house move, examination failure, a minor rejection, hurt, or criminal transgression coming to light etc) acting as the final straw.

In Scotland, concern about possible 'contagion' in parasuicidal behaviour is most readily experienced by those responsible for the care of adolescent in-patients, or of deprived or disadvantaged youngsters in residential settings, where in the course of a week or so, several different adolescents from the same establishment may be admitted to hospital for the treatment of a deliberate overdose.



facing acute stress (less than one month) or chronic stress. The third category is of youngsters under chronic stress who in addition demonstrate considerable behavioural disturbance, and evidence from other work suggests that it is only this group that is likely to be at risk of further parasuicide.

Most agree that a risk assessment should be based upon an examination of the youngster's typical emotional and intellectual responses to stress, understanding the nature of specific precipitants, and the adolescent's impulsivity and habitual coping styles. Counselling directed toward some or all of these, as well as ensuring adequate social support, offers the best chance of avoiding further deliberate self-harm - irrespective of whatever additional problems the youngster may have.

For instance, it might be argued that unless a self-harming sexually abused girl has psychotherapy, an established pattern of parasuicide will inevitably continue. This is not so. Focused problem-solving stands a far better chance of interupting a self-harming pattern, whilst psychotherapy most effectively addresses longer-acting predispositional factors. Referral for a psychiatric opinion is required for a minority, where it seems that individual factors are of at least equal importance to social ones, where no stressful precipitating event can be convincingly identified, a circumstantial but by no means reliable indication of possible depression.

On Tuesday October 10th 1995 the World Health Organisation held a campaigning World Mental Health Day, whose focus was youth mental health. Hopefully, this may help to ensure that the needs of young people receive some prominence. Increasing parents' and other adults' general sensitivity to the emotional needs of children in their care, helping them respond reflectively rather than reflexively, must be the single most important public (mental) health measure any nation can undertake for its youth, and perhaps the greatest challenge for policymakers lies in how this can be made to capture the public's imagination, and commitment. Without this, adults will continue to be afraid of children's potential for harm, perhaps with good reason ■

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If you are a man working with children you may have some special problems to face.

Ian Maxwell investigates.

A Ma

When my daughter Anna went to nursery school she built up a strong bond with John, one of the nursery nurses. I was very pleased that she was getting the chance to see a man working in the nursery, doing all the same things as the female staff and reinforcing the message that men can look after children.

As a somewhat hesitant father trying to find my way around the playdough jungle, I was also glad to find a man on the staff to talk to, even although Anna wasn't in his group.

Now John has returned to Australia, back to university to obtain further teaching qualifications.

The head of that nursery shares my regret that John has moved on. 'We really miss him and so do the children. It was great having a man working here.'

My regret is even greater because I now realise what a rare specimen he was. So rare, in fact, that Lothian Region didn't seem to have included him in their statistics. By their estimate, there are no men amongst the 229 teaching staff in Lothian nurseries.

I hear rumours on the grapevine that there is another male nursery nurse hidden somewhere in Lothian, but have not succeeded in tracking him down. The picture isn't very different in Strathclyde. Of the 2475 full and part-time staff working with pre-fives in the Region, there are only 13 men (all working full time).

According to the 1992 survey of education authority school teachers in Scotland, there were 979 women with teaching qualifications working in nursery schools and only 13 men (**Scottish Office Statistical Bulletin** Edn/G5/1995/7). This does not include nursery nurses or auxiliaries, but it is unlikely that the overall ratio is substantially different.

Men in education form an inverted pyramid, accounting for only 1-2 per cent of staff at nursery level, less than 10 per cent in primary schools, and 50 per cent at the secondary level. When one allows for the fact there are more men than women in promoted posts at primary level (29 per cent of primary heads are men), the slope of the pyramid becomes even steeper.

Going the rounds of the other childcare services, I found a similar picture. There is a scattering of male staff in the playgroup movement, and they are keen to encourage more. According to the Scottish Pre-School Play Association, they have seen a growth in men serving on committees and more fathers involved as volunteer helpers, but there are still only two men out of a total of 250 fieldworkers.

Unfortunately, however much the SPPA promote equal opportunities in their training and publications, the low pay rates for playleaders are likely to deter men from making the effort to become involved: 31 per cent of playleaders receive less than £7 per three hour session, and only 17 per cent are paid more than £10 per session. Playgroups are largely self financing, and there still seems to be a 'low pay' philosophy in the pre-school play movement which ranks low fees to parents more important than increased pay for the workers.

The shortage of men wishing to work with young children is apparent at the training stage. Queen Margaret College in Edinburgh runs a two year course to HNC, which leads to registration with the Scottish Nursery Nursing Board. Senior lecturer Frances Scott says that there are normally only two or three men out of 200 applicants for the 80 place course.

'Usually when men are on the course they are very good with young children. Male nursery nurses tend to be more cautious and distant with children until they become established. We try to be pro-active in encouraging more

> **'For women, the risk of abuse may increase, the men may invade a women's space and be too dominant, and...they may lack the necessary skills and interest to work with young children. For male workers themselves, the main concerns...are the reactions to them working in female-dominated settings, their own isolation, and how they should handle issues of discipline and control.'**
>
> **Sandy Ruxton, National Children's Home**

n's Job ?

males. One thing that conspires against this is the name of the job.'

She agrees that there should be more men in early education. It goes along with the promotion of equal opportunities and the avoidance of gender stereotypes in the nursery. 'Men bring a different and equally valid role model in to a woman-dominated area.' She agrees that there may be suspicion of the motives of a man working with children. All nursery nursing students are interviewed thoroughly to explore their motivation, and police checks are carried out. For their own protection, students shouldn't be left alone with children and sitting a child on a knee is discouraged.

I found a similar picture - at other colleges, with only one or two men in each year, leading to feelings of isolation. They also raised the issues of low pay and little chance of career progression, although the courses are usually over-subscribed.

Following the trail back one further stage brings one into a vicious circle. School children can see for themselves that there are very few men working with young children. Some children won't see a man working in the classroom until secondary. Nursery nursing and other work with young children is seen as a girl's job. Even if careers literature is carefully designed to avoid such stereotypes, there are still fairly rigid assumptions about jobs for men and women.

This problem has been recognised by the nursing profession, who have taken positive steps to encourage more men, but there seems to be no equivalent to Project 2000 in the nursery world. Indeed, one trained nursery nurse I spoke to referred to the 'old guard' who still regard men with suspicion. His approach was to keep his head down and get on with the job, but one wonders how many students on placement have been disheartened by such attitudes?

Out of school care seems to provide a slight glimmer of light. The growth in recent years means there is less chance that these projects have such entrenched attitudes. They are working with a wide age range of children, and because they are removed from the strict hierarchy of the mainstream education system, there seems to be a more flexible attitude and fewer assumptions about male and female roles.

The Cherry Drop Out Of School Club in Dundee encountered some resistance from parents and committee members when the first male worker was appointed. The project leader was accustomed to working in mixed sex teams, and she sold the advantages to her committee. Since then they have employed several men, and feel that it is a great advantage to have a balanced staff team.

Hailesland Out Of School Project started out with a male co-ordinator and now have two other male workers. Because Colin was there from the very start there was no resistance to employing men. When they are making appointments, they bear in mind the aim to have a balanced staff team, but appoint on the basis of ability. They are now finding that quite a few men apply when jobs are advertised, and there are men working at nearby projects.

In talking to male and female workers in a wide range of children's services, I found widespread agreement that more men should be encouraged to work directly with children, particularly at the pre-school stage.

There are a number of reasons why this is not happening. A survey conducted by Sandy Ruxton of National Children's Home (**What's He Doing At The Family Centre**, NCH 1992) took a systematic look at these barriers.

Ruxton distributed a survey to the 77 NCH family Centres, followed up individual interviews with male and female members of staff at these centres.

Not surprisingly, he discovered a lack of male workers. Of the 56 projects completing the survey, 24 had no male workers, 17 had one male worker and eight had two male workers. The remaining seven centres had more than two male staff, rising to a maximum of six at one project. There was a total of 67 men and 543 women working in the centres, including full-time and part-time staff and volunteers. Women tended to work at the same project for longer periods

Differences in age and length of service were examined, and it was found that men tended to have worked for less time in a project and were slightly younger than female staff. This could be because men moved on faster to promoted posts, but could also be a result of recent changes in ideas about men's roles attracting more men into the work.

A **Man's** Job ?

...a self-help group for men working in children's centres in Edinburgh...insisted that their choice of work didn't make them into unusual men. They called themselves 'ordinary men in unusual situations'.

When it come to qualifications there is a very significant difference between male and female staff. Men had qualifications in social work (13), youth and community work (four), education (four), residential care (two) or nursing (one). Although some of the female staff had a similar range of qualifications to the men, nearly 40 per cent of women but none of the men had nursery nursing or playgroup qualifications,

Strategies for involving men in childcare services have been identified in Men As Carers, a report by the European Commission Network on Childcare. They are:

- There need to be men around (for example, as workers)
- Workers, male and female, need training and support in working together.
- Women workers have to change how they relate and react to fathers. There is a strong tendency to address questions about the child to the mother, even when the father is present.
- A diversity of ways and forums for involving men (not only groups or meetings) must be offered, including informal contacts when fathers bring children to centres or pick them up.

  An example of this was in outreach teaching in Pilton. It was noticed that although quite a few fathers brought their children to the school, none of them were ever found in the family room. In order to break down some of the barriers, fathers caring for under fives were persuaded to come to a Dads and Kids singing sessions. After initial resistance, the shyness was overcome and the group even went on tour to local nurseries and old peoples homes, performing nursery songs. Now there are more men in the family room.
- There is a need to reach men as men, rather than fathers. For example, having a job can be so important to male identity that unemployed men feel that they don't count as fathers.

The inverted pyramid shows up again in looking at the levels occupied by men and women. 18 per cent of men were project leaders, compared with 12 per cent of women. At the other end of the scale, 22 per cent of women and only six per cent of men were ancillary staff.

Although the scope of this survey was limited, the differences in the position of men and women are likely to apply to most of the other child care organisations and services. As well as revealing these imbalances, Sandy Ruxton goes on to examine some of the positive consequences of employing more male staff as well as some of the dilemmas.

He lists the dilemmas: 'For women, the risk of abuse may increase, the men may invade a women's space and be too dominant, and...they may lack the necessary skills and interest to work with young children. For male workers themselves, the main concerns - in addition to responding to those above - are the reactions to them working in female-dominated settings, their own isolation, and how they should handle issues of discipline and control.'

Rosemary Milne looked at this sexual imbalance in a previous issue of this magazine. She talked to members of a self-help group for men working in children's centres in Edinburgh. (**Scottish Child**, August/September 1991).

The men she talked to insisted that their choice of work didn't make them into unusual men. They called themselves 'ordinary men in unusual situations'.

Four years later the group of five men still meets and is active in trying to involve male students and increase work with fathers. Kenny from West Pilton Children's Centre used to work in residential care, but shifted to work with young children when the home he was in was closed. He feels that is important to work with this age group. Helping parents regain control of their children while they are very young will tend to avoid problems with adolescents.

Most of the men in the group have social work qualifications. As Kenny put it, 'The nursery nurse qualification is so restrictive - it won't allow you to work with anyone else.' By working in the children's centre, he feels privileged to have been part of something that most men never see. He is very aware of his maleness. 'They've let me in - but I don't take on their identity.'

I talked about these issues to the staff at Hailesland Out of School Care project, which has three male workers. They are all very positive about working with a mixed staff group, and it was the female workers who contributed most to the discussion.

They stressed that it's not just up to men to question the traditional stereotypes. The women have felt the need to divert the boys from the idea that football is for men only, and have made a point of going out and playing. In the club the kids see men doing

Strategies for increasing the number of male workers include:

- Improving salaries, conditions of employment and status.
- Changing policy (including a target of intent to recruit more men, for example 20 per cent of childcare workers should be men by the year 2000.
- Changing implementation (targets, timetables, information and pilot schemes in which staff are not gender based).
- Advising and supporting (including opportunities to meet other male workers)
- Encouraging a change in public opinion about men in such jobs.
- Developing a tradition and culture of childcare work as professional work.

traditionally female jobs, such as washing the dishes, and also see the women doing decorating or woodwork.

Many of the children come from households where there is traditionally a low opinion of women. Some are brought up by mothers with defensive attitudes about males. This may lead to conflict between what is allowed at the project and what happens at home. Also it is difficult to know how far to go in talking to children about sex, for example, or periods, erections or body parts. The project has to set boundaries for this work, and establish strong links with parents so that they don't feel undermined.

The staff sometimes work at an individual level, such as with the boy who expressed the opinion that 'my mother is very lucky to get to wash my socks' or the one who said 'my dad doesn't do sewing' when he asked a female worker to mend a tear in his coat.

Work with the whole group of children can be very productive, especially since the older ones set a strong example. If an older boy is seen as quite happy to dress up the others will follow his lead. They are keen to explore these ideas further using drama.

While almost everyone agrees that it is desirable to involve more men in work with children, it is hard to know where to rank this aim against other necessary and overdue improvements. Britain has an appalling record in the provision of childcare. 'The low pay and status of childcare workers reflects the fact that working with children is regarded as a natural extension women's role in the home which is unpaid,' according to public sector union NUPE.

A fundamental shift in attitudes and actual working conditions would benefit all those who work with children but it is important to ensure that these improvements don't act to exclude women from childcare work, and that men do not just take over the positions of power and influence held by women.

My initial enthusiasm about seeing a man working in the nursery doesn't mean that I have put such men on a pedestal. There will be good and bad male workers, just as there will be good and bad female workers. Men will find it more difficult to work with young children until parenting tasks are shared on a more equal basis. There is the risk that men will want to enter this profession in order to gain access for abuse. But I don't see any harm in hoping that my younger daughter will see at least a few men in the nursery and the classroom before she reaches secondary school ■

Words of Caution

As a parent, both I and my young child have had rewarding experiences of working with men in childcare schemes, and I believe that in general mixed-sex settings add many qualities to such schemes. I and many other mothers would welcome the presence of more male childcare staff of enthusiasm and commitment.

But two things concern, frustrate and often incense me about the approach of most anti-sexist men to the lack of male childcare workers.

The first is the issue of child protection. Often this is not tackled at all (as in Ian Maxwell's article) or when it is, the references are slightly hurt and disparaging. Male workers feel aggrieved that some women view them with suspicion. This suspicion is portrayed as irrational, or it is suggested that once mothers get used to the male workers they will realise they are OK and trustworthy. The presence of men is described in terms like 'a glimmer of light'.

But fears about child protection are far from irrational. The problem is precisely that while the vast majority of men wanting to work in childcare are not abusive, a small minority of abusers deliberately targets all manner of jobs with young people, and shows enormous skill and cunning in doing so. There is simply no way of spotting whether people are 'OK' or not: there are no magic infra-red glasses.

These facts are increasingly accepted in society, and become apparent from court case headlines almost every week. Anti-sexist men must take the problem on board, stop being personally aggrieved and work with women on establishing sensible child protection procedures which ensure the safest possible childcare environment. It can be done and is being done in many places, and it works to the benefit and protection of *all* staff and children. I'm sorry, but it's less vital to have 'good' male role models than it is to have *safe* adults in charge of children: that is the first priority.

The second infuriating aspect for women concerns the frequent references to low pay and poor conditions deterring men and how these must be improved in order to attract more men! They must be improved not to attract men, but out of justice and fairness to the existing women staff. If better conditions then bring in more men, well and good.

Similar arguments have incensed female primary teachers for many years. I appreciate that in his article Ian Maxwell has later made the point that conditions must be improved for all staff, and also that improvements should not just lead to men taking over positions of power and influence ■

Sarah Nelson

Producing *Perfect* Parents

What should we be teaching our children about parenting? Should we be encouraging them to become perfect parents at all? **Stephen Naysmith** looks at the issues.

Everyone seems to have advice for parents these days. Schools tell them they aren't doing enough to prepare their children for education. Sermonising politicians worry about a lack of moral guidance. And countless books offer the solution to successful parenting.

There are few chances for parents to hear they are getting it right. Lone parents are a particular target.

Parents are chastised for leaving children unsupervised - 'home alone' or out on the streets. Other experts say children are over-protected and are not learning to be independent.

But how can people be better prepared for doing a good job when they start a family? Every so often there are calls for parenting to be 'taught' at school, so that young adults are prepared for the time when they become mothers or fathers. Is it possible to 'learn' how to do it properly.

Various approaches have been tried. Parents in a Learning Society is a project run by the Royal Society for the Encouragement of the Arts (RSA). It offers certificates in parenting, giving parents accreditation for their learning and achievements.

The project aims to build on the success of home-school link schemes by getting parents more involved in school life. This can mean actually coming into the classroom and has major benefits, according to Lesley James, Head of Education at RSA.

'The aim was to find ways in which parents could help with their children's learning,' she says. 'Often it would help parents with their own learning as well, but that was seen as a by-product. Making it a stated aim might have put some people off.'

Parents have become involved in aspects of the curriculum through a series of workshops in 10 trial schools. 'We offered parents our own certificates as some reward for the work that they had done,' says James.

She believes that the project has been a success. 'What we have proved is that the school could actually see an increase in participation in a range of events, from general curriculum work to workshops for children with special needs.'

The differences were dramatic, James argues. 'The children's work improved, their behaviour improved and parents became more responsive to other aspects of their child's education.'

Parents who had taken part said they were more confident about everything from listening to their child read to helping with homework at secondary school level. The cost was, she says, surprisingly low. 'There was £750 on offer to each school taking part, which meant that time and effort were the main expenses.'

Similar tactics have been adopted by Education Departments in a less formal way. Strathclyde Region already encourages parents to become more involved in their child's education, but extends the remit beyond simply tackling school work and behaviour.

According to Cameron Monroe of Strathclyde's Education Department there are two separate issues involved. 'There are the behavioural issues such as discipline, and cognitive issues which are to do with the child as a learner. There used to be this thing called parenting and this thing called education and they were separate.'

Strathclyde have produced materials to encourage parents to be directly involved in the child's education, but they also want to see parents working on preparing children for learning. 'There is a tremendous value in just talking and listening, discussing what is done at school. We try to provide ways they can do that together.'

Sometimes it is too late for that to work. 'We have more crisis oriented groups for parents to work together too. But

'There are the behavioural issues such as discipline, and cognitive issues which are to do with the child as a learner. There used to be this thing called parenting and this thing called education and they were separate.'

Cameron Monroe, Education Department, Strathclyde Region

very often we talk about bringing parents in only when it is a perceived problem.'

Schools have a bad habit, Monroe says, of contacting parents only in cases of bad behaviour. 'If a child behaves well there is a tendency to think it is our doing. But if parents are an influence they have to be an influence all the time.'

There is work aimed at involving parents in the 5-14 curriculum and the targets that sets, but also attempts to tackle behavioural and emotional issues such as what to do if a child is shoplifting or being offered cigarettes.

The issues involved are broad, according to Monroe. 'Social and vocational skills help, budgeting and other things. It is about the community as well as the home.'

The Education Department does recognise some of its failings. 'Many teachers have never been parents, but they have got to promote and value families,' says Monroe. 'It is easy to be critical. People out here are doing a tremendous amount to actually survive, and if they are struggling how do we promote positive parenting? And when?'

There are inescapable class issues involved too. Whose perception of 'good parenting' are we adopting? 'It may be we need to get teachers across the country to question the low level of expectations they have of parents. Rather than just promoting certain values, we should question what we are aiming for.'

Strathclyde Region will not be around for much longer, however. 'With a longer shelf-life for the Region there could have been a wholesale commitment.' It remains to be seen what tack incoming authorities will take.

Involving fathers is another approach which has been tried with some success, this time in Edinburgh, where a group of Muirhouse dads have formed a troupe of singing fathers who visit their own children's schools and nurseries and others, getting involved, singing songs and reading to pupils.

The impact was tremendous for Derek Sinclair, a single father of three. 'I felt there was nothing to do after three years on my own with the kids. I felt alone going into the parents room at school because it was always mothers. I just sat there.'

He was apprehensive, not having had much to do with other people's children before. 'It was really great, the expression on their faces. I have become much more involved and active with the school. I am closer to my son and have more understanding of the nursery and schooling.'

Others in the group had never changed a nappy before they went on a weekend away, just the dad and their kids. Some are now involved in school boards, and taking a much greater interest in their children's progress.

There are plenty of self-help guides available to put people on the right track. One of these, *Positive Parenting*, by Sue Miller, tackles the idea of parental accreditation by letting parents evaluate their own performance.

Miller is Senior Psychologist with Durham Country Council and she acknowledges the difficulty of the job parents have. 'Parenting is work, but no-one asks parents to pass exams or get references to qualify. There are few tasks where so much training takes place in post. It is difficult to imagine anyone being prepared to undertake any other role with such unsocial hours and levels of responsibility for no pay - and in fact considerable cost.'

She encourages parents to recognise the expertise they have when it comes to their own children, rather than fall prey to hostility elsewhere. 'The news is filled with examples which are said to demonstrate failures to parent effectively.'

The package is printed on brightly coloured paper, and is approachable. Yet even though it suggests that it is perfectly all right to drop the programme when you are particularly under stress or struggling to cope, it seems unlikely that the book will find a place in more than a small number of similar homes.

The fact is that much of the advice on parenting is coming from middle-class people who value a middle-class style of parenting. Psychology is all very well, for instance, but much of it is incorporated quite happily into many families without jargon - through the folklore of parenting.

That doesn't mean lower income families don't need other kinds of help. Pre-school education is vital. It not only improves children's performance when the start school, but continues throughout their education. Children who start well tend to be the ones with high self-esteem and ambitions at 16 too.

continued p. 21

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A Scottish environmental theatre company is taking a generation of youngsters back to nature. Jean West reports.

A 12,000-year-old epic with goodies, baddies and fast action adventure has become a big hit 'in-your-face' exercise in environmental education. The Pine and the Eagle, a drama now touring Scotland, is relaying the beautiful and tragic facts behind the country's natural heritage to schoolchildren using all the ingredients of a mainstream blockbuster. Dramatic and changing panoramic landscapes, heroes and heroines, talking animals who sometimes triumph over evil, all combine to convey difficult or political arguments that might otherwise leave school children yawning.

Created by Environmental Arts, the interactive musical drama was jointly commissioned by Edinburgh District Council's Festival of the Environment, where it premiered in May, and Scottish Natural Heritage. Broadcasting botanist and company patron Dr. David Bellamy hailed it as 'the best drama of its kind I have ever seen'.

The ambitious production takes a captive audience on a physical adventure through three impressive sets - an underground room where a cookery class is employed to demonstrate how the earth was shaped, a forest room which explains how man's penchant for the Douglas fir has challenged the ecological balance of plant and animal life, and an underwater room which debates how man has emptied the seas.

The main arena sees the spectacular melting of five ice ages to uncover hills, a loch and a forest together with their animal occupants, all slowly eroded through time.

Comedy, music, dance and drama unite for the jaunt through history to reveal how, to quote Greenpeace, 'humans have made a rubbish tip of Paradise', causing extinction and suffering. Then the audience themselves are asked to pass a jury judgement on the 'destructor', a kind of grim reaper usurper of the land.

According to Connol Cochrane of Scottish Natural Heritage, 'the arts are a really good way of putting across the message that we must care for our natural heritage. Drama and music touch people in a way that reading doesn't always.

'The Pine and the Eagle tries to show that things move on, that Bronze Age man, the Viking iron master and the Industrial Revolution all affected the shape of the environment.

'The play is important in tackling the idea that someone else is responsible for making everything okay. We want children to realise

What the audience thought

- Ian McKenzie, (11): 'It was great. I like the midgy and the beaver. I had not really learnt much about the animals that used to live here before. I knew there were once bears in Scotland but it was sad when the last one died. I learnt a lot from the play.

- Darren Fleming, (10) : 'I enjoyed being in the jury. We decided very quickly who was the baddie. It was a good show.'

- Anna Healey of St Andrew's School, Ramsbottom, who took part in another Environmental Arts play, Sinking Ark, said that before the play she didn't think much about the world: 'The play changed my mind and I was that interested I joined Greenpeace.'

Comedy, music, dance and drama unite for the jaunt through history to reveal how...'humans have made a rubbish tip of Paradise', causing extinction and suffering.

Play with Fire

that they need to take the initiative and do something practical for the environment.

'By showing them that Scotland was once covered in ice, and that not that long ago we had the beaver and the elk, both of which are no longer here, probably because of our actions, they can appreciate a historical progression.'

Although the target audiences have been primary school children and S1 and S2 pupils, older children seem to find the storyline equally fascinating. Teachers have been encouraged to use it as the basis for preparatory work, and pupils to bring along things they have made to use in the set.

Drama was a perfect vehicle for distilling information for young people, according to Edinburgh theatre animateur and director Andy Cannon. 'Theatre uses the medium that children are most familiar with, that of play. That is basically how they explore the world. It gives them permission to use their imaginations in a creative way.

'A colleague of mine used dance as a way of conveying the geological history surrounding Edinburgh's Arthur's Seat from early volcanic eruptions of smelted lava to the present day. She knew she would have struggled to make it interesting using a different medium.

'Capturing a child's interest and making sure they don't switch off is vital when you are trying to convey just about any subject. Why should issues surrounding the environment be any different?'

This is borne out in the aims of Environmental Arts, whose previous productions have dealt with worthy issues like recycling, smoking and Scotland's forests. All used creative theatre to get their message across.

According to Artistic Director Malcolm Le Maistre, 'No-one seemed to be tackling environmental issues with young people through this medium. They were all getting on with their own environmental thing at work or school and so we felt it was time to specialise.

'We were also aware that with this kind of show we needed to get things absolutely spot on. There may be issues that are difficult to agree on, like land ownership, but we try to make it clear that we are not saying all landowners are irresponsible. Kids need to know these things.

'We are not trying to judgemental. It is too easy to preach and condemn. Most of the kids, for example, like the destructor character because he does represent the things they like.

Peter Baynes, who wrote the script, believes that people need to know the facts so that they can make up their own minds about the threat to our environment, and that this is a job that theatre can help out with. 'Young people are important for the future. They are the ones who will be making informed decisions. Children have a great capacity for understanding complex issues.

'Writing the play meant a lot of time in the library, a lot of time debating the current issues. Most of the cast are now clued up on these - if they weren't before.'

According to Friends of the Earth, it is very important to target young people when it comes to environmental ideas. 'We don't run a kids club or youth side of the organisation simply because we are strapped for cash, but we do target schools with literature and information packs,' says Information Officer George Baxter.

'I think children understand the ideas a lot better than adults. A lot of environmental problems are about future generations and not taking from the earth what will be needed by them. We are running out of oil; we are polluting water and air; we are destroying the soil and forests and upsetting the balance of gases in the atmosphere. Things are looking very black for people in the next century. Kids understand this while adults are more obsessed with their mortgages.'■

Environmental Arts

The Pine and the Eagle has been seen by more than 3000 people. It will be touring Glasgow, Edinburgh and Grangemouth during the first three weeks of November.

For more information contact Deirdre McMahon on 0131-228 5273.

Environmental Arts are also seeking funding for various new projects, including a performance piece about animals and their struggle to avoid extinction. In addition they want to create a database to make their work available to schools and communities throughout Scotland.

Happy 7th Birthday from Friends of Scottish Child

Busa Cochrane-Muir, Upper Largo
Who Cares? Scotland
Sidney Hill, near Lockerbie
Malcolm Chalmer, Ilkley
Caroline Naysmith, Bristol
P. Barton,Burntisland
Kerelaw School, Stevenston
David Harvie, Leeds
Young Families Now Project, Aberdeen
Irene McGugan, Letham
A. Coyle, London
Bob Goupillot, Edinburgh
Anne Black, Edinburgh
Eildon Dwyer, Glasgow
William Wolfe, Lanark
Connie Hadden, Aberdeen
Patrick Boase, Glasgow
E. & A.L. Bothwell, Glasgow
Dr. Helen Zealley, Edinburgh
Lucille MacLeod, Livingston
Val Graham, Castle Douglas
Susan Moody, Dundee
E. E. Richards, Newton Stewart
Alistair Duff, Edinburgh
Stirling District Council
Scott Institute of Human Relations, Edinburgh & Glasgow
Central Scotland Police HQ
Langlees Family Centre, Falkirk
Ruth Anderson & Co., Kilwinning
National Foster Care Association, Glasgow
Joan Pennycook, Alloa
Dr. S. Lapsley, Greenock
Fair Isle Children's Centre, Kirkaldy
Volunteer Tutors Organisation, Edinburgh
Roger Graef, London
A.L. Stevenson, Glasgow
Anne Marie Smith, Dunfermline
Susan Shearer, Edinburgh
Daphne Purves, West Kilbride
One in Three Mobile Creche, Glasgow
Capability, Edinburgh
Tony Clarke, Glasgow
Jennifer Nimmo Smith, Edinburgh
Drew Paul & Murray (Solicitors), Perth
Crozier, Philpott & Platt , Glasgow
The Bruce Trust, Edinburgh
Paul Hare, Edinburgh
Paul Machell, Edinburgh
Aberdeen Women's Centre
Rena Phillips, Dollar
Edinburgh & East of Scotland Society for the Deaf.
Dept.of Social Work, Northern College of Education, Dundee.
Member Services, Central Regional Council.
Health Education Centre, Edinburgh
Castlemilk Play Forum
Daphne Robertson, Sheriff Court Glasgow.
Edinburgh Family Service Unit

Best Wishes ! to **Scottish Child** from **Terri**, **Barbara** and **Jane** at, **Raploch Primary Schools Project** c/o St Mary's Primary School, Drip Road, Raploch, Stirling FK81RR. Telephone: 01786 445299.

Congratulations! on your continuing good work for the most creative members of our community: Children. **Scottish Poetry Library** Tweeddale Court, 14 High Street, Edinburgh, EH1 1TE. Telephone: 0131 557 2876.

Producing *Perfect* Parents

You can teach parents about budgeting, but some kind of basic psychology might be useful for negotiation and peace-keeping. As a parent you could learn about food preparation and hygiene but life might be easier if you knew about car maintenance too. In short, education of any sort is valuable.

But how do you start your child off well if you yourself are struggling? Will classes in better parenting do the job? Or do you need the financial security to be able to feed and clothe yourself and your children well? What about good housing and strong support networks?

While it is important to recognise when parents are doing a good job, it is vital that we examine the areas in which society is singularly failing in its obligation to help and support. Childcare and other options for helping people to return to work are just one obvious example of an area in need of improvement.

This issue will be one of those debated in a national conference in Aberdeen in November. Supporting Parents, run by Children in Scotland (CIS), will look at the scapegoating of parents and ask what mums and dads really need to back up their efforts.

The idea of educating for parenthood is likely to be among the aspects discussed. 'You hear a lot about parents taking the flak for what their children do,' says Annie Gunner, CIS Information Officer. 'With the emphasis on parental choice as well we have seen a big shift and an awful burden of responsibility is being placed on parents.'

Placing all the onus on parents shouldn't be used as an excuse for those who could do more to help, she says. It often seems a handy method of ignoring the general social problems which can handicap parenting, though.

'It used to be single parents, now it is all parents who seem to be to blame. But it is about a lot more than that,' Gunner argues. 'You have to look at employment policy, the social and economic circumstances. If you are wondering where your family's next meal is coming from, all this talk about 'developing skills' is a bit much.'

The emphasis of the conference is on the support parents need. It will be launched with the results of a national survey of parents, produced in conjunction with the Family Policy Studies Centre. This will catalogue the views of parents who have had difficulties with their children on their experience of seeking help.

But the focus isn't solely on parents whose children happen to be in receipt of social work support or who have come into contact with other agencies. 'What is needed are universal services so that you aren't just focusing on people whose problems have already manifested themselves,' says Annie Gunner.

The idea of parenting classes is a red herring. Spotlighting bad parenting as the reason for youth indiscipline is inadequate. In Scotland 28 per cent of children under 16, more than one in four, are living in households dependent on income support. Every day, according to Shelter, 84 Scottish children become homeless.The number of Severe Hardship Payments made to 16 and 17 year olds has risen steadily since 1989 - under 5000 then, more than 20,000 last year.

None of this means that young people should turn to crime or become teenage parents, drop out of school or take drugs. But it serves to point out that there are many factors which parents have no control over. Accusing them of being responsible for all the country's ills is foolish. Likewise suggesting that they can be taught to 'do it right' is dubious.

What do you teach young people in order for them to become better parents? What is the magic ingredient?

You can teach parents about budgeting, but some kind of basic psychology might be useful for negotiation and peace-keeping. As a parent you could learn about food preparation and hygiene but life might be easier if you knew about car maintenance too. In short, education of any sort is valuable. Bringing parents into schools and getting them more involved in the learning process is helpful. There is certainly a place in Scottish society for an emphasis on getting fathers more involved in child-rearing.

However giving parents the confidence and security to get children off to the best start possible depends on outside factors as well. It is simplistic and patronising to suggest that we can teach a package of skills that will allow a new generation of parents to turn out perfectly formed socially responsible young people ■

Containment versus Dignity

Has the time come to put human dignity before containment when dealing with young offenders? John Simpson thinks it has.

The time has come for social workers to warn the government - if it will listen - of the dangers inherent in the increasing emphasis on the containment of young offenders There will be negative consequences for both the young people and for society. First, however, social workers must learn to be more honest with themselves about the realities of residential care as a whole and more willing to act as advocates for the children they care for.

I have drawn these rather negative conclusions from my experience as a field social worker and particularly as a residential social worker in a school for young offenders and school refusers in Glasgow in 1991.

This school had an avowed Christian ethic. Its literature identified 'the inherent dignity of every pupil' as a guiding value. This emphasis will be familiar to many as a model for residential care, and it is fundamentally important if more than physical care and containment are the goals.

At this school, however, I saw a total contradiction between the overt values held by the school itself and the actual values expressed by the behaviour of staff and management. Even relatively trivial details pointed to a culture that was often abusive: I remember opening a desk drawer in one of the staff offices to find it full of cigarette butts.

Much worse than this, there was often a lack of basic respect for the dignity of colleagues. Abusive remarks would be made by staff against management and vice versa. I particularly remember the comments made by a male staff member about a female worker. On learning that I was not married, he informed me that she would 'take on anybody, even the boys'. I never met this woman as she was off sick during my time at the school. Perhaps it was this sort of attitude that made her sick.

There was also a marked lack of respect towards the boys themselves, expressed in the use of epithets such as 'shits' and 'turds' to refer to them.

Still on the level of verbal abuse, I can remember many examples of staff boasting about violent acts. In some cases this may have been no more than boasting, as it was no small part of the staff culture to try to maintain a macho image. However this boasting played its part in creating an atmosphere of violence within the school. One of the most sinister examples was a statement made to me. 'Remember pin-down?', asked a staff member with obvious pride. 'That's nothing compared to what we do here.'

This sort of attitude was inevitably expressed in the behaviour of the staff towards the boys. At a very basic level, some staff had little time for the boys and saw the minimal contact of a 'quiet night' as the goal of an evening's work. I this connection, I recall how one member of staff announced he had dealt with a troublesome absconder he had found in the school grounds. 'I told the fucking little arsehole to fuck off,' he said. The worker had ensured that the boy would not be part of the staff's problems that night. But how safe was the boy on his own?

I witnessed (a) senior member of staff dealing with a child refusing to go to class by pulling him up by his clothing a repeatedly throwing him down into a variety of chairs. 'Now you might think I was bullying that boy,' the man explained later. 'But I wasn't. I was just showing him I was stronger.'

Even more distressing was the level of physical violence present in the school. I saw a worker leap across a room full of other boys to wrestle a pupil to the ground. Apparently this was response to the pupil's defiance and verbal abuse. I saw a senior member of staff grab and child a propel him forcefully into the side of a large metal bin. I witnessed another senior member of staff dealing with a child refusing to go to class by pulling him up by his clothing a repeatedly throwing him down into a variety of chairs. 'Now you might think I was bullying that boy,' the man explained later. 'But I wasn't. I was just showing him I was stronger.'

There may have been other incidents, perhaps worse, which occurred out of my sight. I say this because many members of staff offered me very similar advice when I admitted to having difficulty with the boys' behaviour. They said I should 'get the boy on his own, make sure there are no witnesses and do what you have to do'.

What underlay the staff's behaviour, I think, was a fear of acknowledging the personal vulnerabilities the task exposed. Many of the boys were extremely emotionally and behaviourally disturbed. However there seemed little room within the staff culture to acknowledge the impact that working with such boys had on the workers. Instead a fear of acknowledging their own personal vulnerability was hidden in their response to those who were perceived as not coping: they were seen as having failed.

The impact of all this on the boys themselves must have been both significant and complex. However it is possible to suggest some ways in which they might have been affected.

For some, it would confirm their experience of the world as an abusive and emotionally empty place. It would also tend to confirm that in the adult world superior physical strength gives one person the right to dominate another. They might learn that acknowledging one's own vulnerability is seen as a shameful thing in the adult world.

Overall, it is difficult to see how these boys could avoid becoming further alienated. It would seem likely that their anti-social behaviour could only be encouraged and given an opportunity to increase in sophistication. They would learn such sophisticated subversion from the very people ostensibly there to address the problems which led to their offending in the first place.

Where the boys were repetitive offenders, communities would enjoy welcome relief for a year or so. But not all the boys were repetitive offenders: in such cases there was not even that short-term benefit. Some boys, in fact, were sent to the school merely to address school-attendance difficulties and were quite unprepared for the emotionally and behaviourally disturbed young people they would meet.

I do not know how typical my experience is. I would suggest that it remains the responsibility of each of us involved in childcare to identify and address the extent to which the issues raised here are relevant to them and within their workplace.

However I would also make the general point that the more the aim of an institution is limited to containing the child the more potential there appears to be for an abusive climate to flourish. This is because containment can lead to a dehumanisation of the relationship between adult and child or carer and cared for.

It is important not to conclude without referring to some examples of residential care that do translate the inherent dignity of the individual into practice. Such places not only care for the children but do so for the benefit of society by addressing their offending behaviour in a meaningful way.

It would seem that social work may have a role in making such benefits more widely known. If successful, the profession may even encourage the Home Secretary to consider the notion of individual dignity as well as narrowly conceived notions of protecting the community when he considers the fate of repetitive juvenile offenders ■

Banged up Beaten up

With Home Secretary Michael Howard advocating a 'get tough' policy for juvenile offenders, **Mike Grewcock** argues that what we really need is an informed, compassionate and measured approach, one which recognises that most young people grow out of crime and that those who offend are often victims themselves.

Juvenile justice policy in England and Wales has been reduced to a shambles. There are record numbers of teenagers in prison, record levels of self-harm and suicide amongst teenage prisoners and a range of confused proposals for boot camps and commercially-run detention centres. None of this will reduce re-offending but it does cost a lot of money - approximately £500 per week for a prison cell compared with an annual cost of £1200 for a safer and more effective community sentence.

The present emphasis on imprisonment and punishment stands in stark contrast to the optimism accompanying the Criminal Justice Act 1991. When that Act was implemented in October 1992, there was an expectation that 15 and 16 year-olds would disappear from the prison system and that the many positive community-based alternatives developed during the 1980s would be properly funded and expanded. Multi-disciplinary youth justice teams expected to play a positive role helping the Youth Court, liaising with the police and ensuring that young people in trouble were diverted out of the criminal justice system. Now there is deep demoralisation amongst youth justice workers, many of whom are forced to play a purely reactive role with a minimum of resources.

So, what went wrong?

The short answer is that the political will to deal creatively and compassionately with teenagers in trouble evaporated when Michael Howard became Home Secretary. However, there is also a public perception that juvenile crime is out of control and that 'soft' sentencing options are partly responsible. The image of teenage offenders being rewarded with expensive safari holidays is a grotesque caricature of what most young people experience in the criminal justice system, but is no less powerful for it. The intense media coverage following the awful death of James Bulger in February 1993 and the disturbances involving teenagers on housing estates in Oxford, Cardiff and Tyneside the previous year, helped fuel an image of very young, violent, out-of-control youth. The Labour Party's acceptance of many of the assumptions underpinning Michael Howard's approach also undermines a more accurate view.

It is a remarkable fact that the emphasis during the mid-late 1980s on diverting teenagers out of the criminal justice system by cautioning, providing bail support in the community for those charged with serious offences and imposing community based sentences following conviction, helped reduce the number of repeat offenders by 37 percent between 1979 and 1989. Moreover, between 1990 and 1993, when juvenile crime is widely assumed to have flourished, the number of offenders actually fell (*see box*). Nevertheless, 'tough measures' to deal with young people have been a central focus of Government policy since Michael Howard's speech to the 1993 Conservative Party Conference outlined 'a 27-point plan for reducing crime'.

Criminal justice procedures for young people in England and Wales are complicated. The age of criminal responsibility is 10 and teenagers aged 10 to 17 have their matters heard by a separate Youth Court. However, if the offence carries a maximum

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penalty of 14 years or more for an adult, the young person will be tried before judge and jury in a normal adult court (the Crown Court).

Boys aged 15 can be remanded or sentenced to an adult prison or a Young Offender Institution. Girls can be remanded to prison aged 17 and commence serving a prison sentence at 15. Boys and girls aged 10 to 14 can be remanded into the care of a local authority which can then apply to the court to place the child in a secure unit.

The maximum sentence which can be imposed by a Youth Court is two years in a Young Offender Institution (prison). A boy or girl under 15 will not get a custodial sentence unless the offence is one for which an adult could receive a maximum of 14 years or more. This sentence will normally be served in a local authority secure unit until the child is at least 15 and can be transferred to a prison. Otherwise, a range of supervision orders and other community-based sanctions apply.

Despite the relatively stable level of offending, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of teenagers sent to prison. The number of 15 year-olds in prison custody rose from 28 on 30th June 1991 to 200 on 31st December 1994. The number of 15 to 17 year-old boys jumped from 1380 in June 1992 to 1519 in December 1994. Between October 1993 and September 1994, the number of 15 to 17 year-old remands shot up to 1478 - an increase of 86 percent.

This can only have a negative and damaging effect on the young people concerned. During 1994, the Howard League conducted an inquiry into violence against teenagers in custody. Visits to 15 prisons and interviews with 86 young people revealed overcrowded institutions and poorly trained staff totally unable to cope with difficult and often disturbed adolescents. Self-harm is widespread, even in those institutions with good prevention policies, and there was a record number of suicides. Chair of the Inquiry, Helena Kennedy QC, said:

'The Inquiry found such widespread bullying and self-destructive behaviour amongst young people in custody that it is impossible to see anything positive coming from their incarceration... As soon as faces and histories are given to the young people who are steadily filling our youth prisons, one is left with an overwhelming sense of the hopelessness and wretchedness of their prospects. Creating bins for society's problems and locking up children invites the sort of bullying and violence we encountered in the course of our inquiry. The whole approach is wrong. We have to be bold enough to say so.'

The Inquiry recommended the removal of all teenagers under 18 from the prison system and the placement in local authority secure units of the small minority of teenage prisoners convicted of serious violent offences. It argued for a strategy which addresses the causes of offending and recognises that many of those who offend have been victims themselves or become victims within the prison system. The Inquiry recommended a response to teenage offending based on the Children Act 1989 and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child - both of which give paramount importance to the interests and needs of the child and allow imprisonment only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest possible time.

Such an approach is light years away from Michael Howard's 'prison works' philosophy and the associated calls for more discipline and exemplary punishment, including physical punishment, of teenagers.

Michael Howard's two most publicised 'initiatives' are the secure training centres (STCs) for 12 to 14 year-olds and the boot camps for 18 to 21 year-olds. These are entirely separate proposals although they are often lumped together by the media and in the rhetoric emanating from the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee.

Secure training centres are a key feature of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. Section 1 of the Act creates a new sentence, a secure training order, for a 12 to 14 year-old child who has committed three imprisonable offences, and has been found by a court to be in breach of a supervision order, or has been convicted for an imprisonable offence whilst subject to a supervision order.

A secure training order can last for six months to two years, with a minimum of one half being spent in a secure training centre. In the words of Michael Howard's predecessor, Kenneth Clarke, it is supposed to deal with 'that comparatively small group of very persistent offenders whose repeated offending makes them a menace to the community'. In reality, it could target teenagers who have only offended twice.

The Home Office plans to build five commercially operated STCs capable of detaining 200 children. None of the research on persistent young offenders justifies this. The Home Office's own study of police files, published in February 1994, identified a maximum of 106 children arrested three times or more in 1992 and concluded: 'It is difficult to clearly and reliably identify a small group of young offenders that can be described as persistent.'

The study stressed the 'disrupted and chaotic lifestyles, disproportionate experiences of loss, poor school histories, heavy alcohol and drug use and experience of psychological or counselling help' which characterise most young people in trouble.

These findings illustrate why the Government's punitive response is entirely wrong. They show the need for a strategy which focuses on the individual causes of offending and provides support rather than blind condemnation. If the centres go ahead, children as young as 12 will be sent to isolated and closed institutions which could be hundreds of miles from their families, friends and support networks.

The Government has invited tenders for two of the proposed sites. Most of the nine commercial firms in the running operate private adult prisons in Britain and the United States. Their ability to provide specialist adolescent care is debatable, especially given that the draft operational specifications are based on Prison Rules and fail to even mention the Children Act or the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Howard League has therefore applied for judicial review to have the tendering process and the documents declared unlawful.

Number of 10-16 year olds found guilty or cautioned* for all offences 1990-1993**

Year	Found guilty	Cautioned	Found guilty and cautioned
1990	37,255	112,081	149,336
1991	32,544	105,622	138,206
1992	29,006	112,867	141,878
1993	29,260	99,870	129,130

* excludes motoring offences
** figures presented to the House of Commons, 16 December 1994

'Boot camps appear to be no more effective than traditional prisons in preventing future crimes. Most of the programmes that have monitored recidivism have found only marginal differences which diminish over time...'

Home Office official

Boot camps are based on explicit notions of discipline and punishment. These prisons operate a military style regime with an emphasis on physical training, repeated drills, hard labour and strict discipline. The Government has announced a six-month pilot project for 18 to 21 year-olds at the Thorn Cross Young Offender Institution near Warrington and is also considering using the Colchester Military Corrective Training Centre (the Glasshouse).

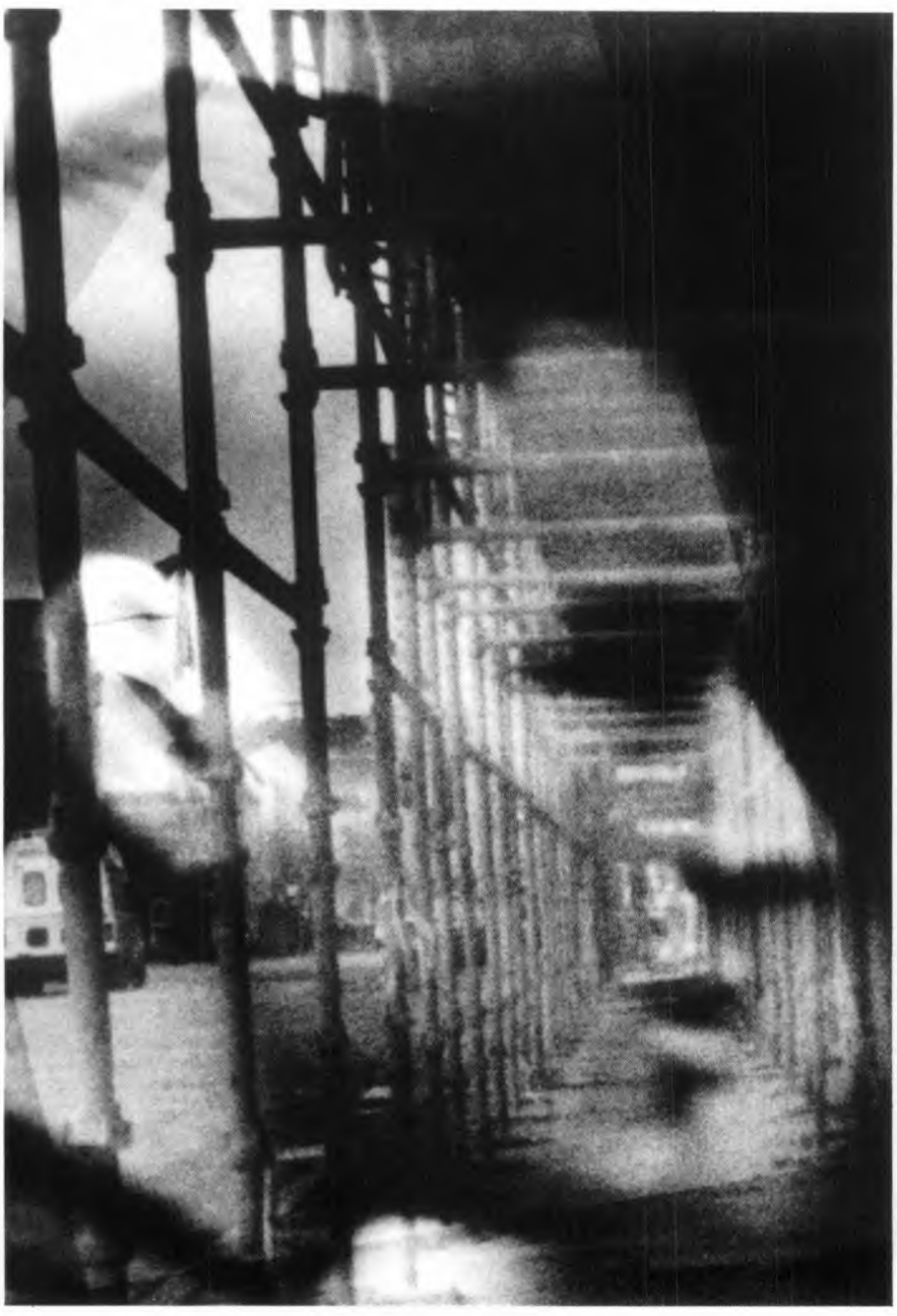
Past attempts at this have failed. In 1980, the Government introduced a 'short, sharp shock' regime into four detention centres holding teenagers aged 14 to 21. The military routine led to a high rate of burn-out and demoralisation amongst staff and according to the Home Office, had 'no discernible effect on the rate at which trainees were reconvicted'. Moreover, there was evidence to suggest that by improving young people's fitness, the centres made it easier for them to re-offend. Magistrates quickly lost faith in detention centres which fell into disuse before being abolished in 1988.

However, since 1983, over 50 boot camps have been established in the United States. They hold mainly non-violent 16 to 25 year-old offenders and have a suitably punitive image: the Adolescent Reception and Detention Centre at Riker's Island, New York, is nick-named the 'House of Pain'. They are no more successful than the 'short, sharp, shock'. Home Office officials who visited the United States in May 1994 concluded: 'Boot camps appear to be no more effective than traditional prisons in preventing future crimes. Most of the programmes that have monitored recidivism have found only marginal differences which diminish over time... Many of the practices used in boot camps...such as humiliation, institutionalised humiliation by staff, eye-balling, summary punishments etc. would be unacceptable in the UK for legal reasons. They would also be contrary to the Prison Service Statement of Purpose, Vision, Goals and Values.'

The Home Secretary has timed the Thorn Cross announcement to coincide with the Conservative Party conference. Talk of tough discipline will no doubt raise a cheer from the party faithful but will do nothing to address the very serious problems underpinning teenage offending and the hurt and damage it causes.

Instead, we need an informed, compassionate and measured approach which recognises that most young people grow out of crime and that those who offend are often victims themselves ■

Mike Grewcock, Legal Policy Officer, Howard League for Penal Reform



The following reports are available from the Howard League, 708 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL:

Banged Up Beaten Up Cutting Up, Report of the Howard League Commission of Inquiry into Violence in Penal Institutions for Teenagers under18;
£10.00 plus £1.50 p&p.

Child Offenders: UK and International Practice, Report of the Howard League Children and Crime Conference;
£5.00 plus £1.50 p&p.

Troubleshooter: A project to rescue 15 year-olds from prison, Report of the first year;
£10.00 plus £1.50 p&p.

Secure Training Centres: Repeating past failures, Howard League briefing paper;
£3.00.

A Breath of Fresh Air

Childhood asthma is on the increase. What causes this potentially life threatening condition? How can we cope with it? What can we do about it?

Liz Brodie has the answers.

Childhood asthma is an extremely common and potentially life-threatening condition which deserves special attention at every level. Its prevalence continues to increase and it now affects one child in every seven. Current understanding of childhood asthma has greatly improved thanks to scientific research but many problems remain. For example, asthma is not a simple condition to describe. It may be helpful to think of it as a syndrome with many different manifestations. One child's experience of asthma will be very different to another's - asthma can be mild or serious, allergic or non-allergic, but it is always at its worst potentially life-threatening and, at the very least disruptive to a child and its family's life.

Untreated childhood asthma is a condition in which children experience persistent or recurrent cough and/or wheeze, particularly at night, after colds or exercise. All these children will need an inhaler to relieve their symptoms, and many will need regular daily preventative medication too. Many children with asthma will suffer sleep disturbance and tiredness. This in turn will have an impact on their time at school. All too often children experience episodes of acute breathing difficulties which require emergency treatment, frequent trips to the GP and even admission to hospital. For many of these children, asthma makes them feel different from other children - they can't take part in sports at school and, for some, teasing and bullying is a problem too.

No one really knows why asthma has increased among children and much more research is needed before we will have an answer to this question. Among the many possible contributors to the increase are changes in our diet; changes in our home environment which have increased our exposure to the house-dust mite (which causes allergic reactions in about 80 per cent of children with asthma); increased exposure to cigarette smoke, particularly maternal smoking during pregnancy; traffic pollution and many other known asthma ' triggers ' such as colds and other viruses, pollen and animals.

It is likely that a number of these factors have combined to cause the increased prevalence of asthma among children but, until we understand what causes asthma, we will not known what factors have contributed to its increase.

We do know that there are two very distinct forms of asthma among children. Most very young children have asthma attacks in response to viral infections and 80 per cent of these are in response to the common cold virus or rhinovirus. These cases of asthma are unrelated to allergy. Research from a 25-year study carried out in Aberdeen has shown that this form of asthma has a very good outcome, with the vast majority of young children growing out of the condition.

The Prevalence of Asthma

The National Asthma Campaign now estimates that there are over 1,000,000 children with asthma in the UK and this figure is on the increase. The number of children with diagnosed asthma has doubled since the 1970s and, on average, 155 children are admitted to hospital every day because of this condition.

In Scotland, there were 120 deaths from asthma in 1993, five more than in 1992. In 1994, 119 people died from the condition. This is especially shocking when research has shown that 80 per cent of asthma deaths are preventable. Thankfully fewer than 30 children die from asthma in the UK every year - but each death from asthma is a tragedy.

What is asthma?

The underlying mechanism of asthma is abnormal inflammation in the airways of the lungs making them sensitive. In response to a range of trigger factors, mostly environmental, the airways narrow.

The capacity for these airways to carry oxygen in and carbon dioxide out of the lungs is reduced by the inflammation which makes them narrow. This is because the fine muscles around the airway walls contract, the tissues making up the walls of the airway swell and become thickened, and the sticky mucus that is produced blocks the airway.

Preventer medication is designed to treat the underlying inflammation of the airways to 'prevent' breathing difficulties occurring. Reliever medication is used when someone with asthma is having breathing problems; just before exercise, or when people with asthma encounter factors that may trigger their symptoms, eg pollen, cigarette smoke.

The other main form of asthma among children is allergic asthma. This is associated with a strong family or personal history of allergic conditions, such as eczema or hayfever, which may accompany wheezing. Research from Southampton has shown that allergic sensitisation to the droppings of house-dust mites (which inhabit our beds and soft furnishings in their millions) develop during pregnancy or in the first few months of life. The effect of this may lie dormant for months or even years but can lead to the development of asthma symptoms.

Bullying, name-calling, being unable to go on school trips or take part in sports activities and feeling self-conscious are just some of the social problems faced by children with asthma. In addition, children with asthma have to learn to live with their symptoms and to take responsibility for controlling their condition through medication - as well as coping with time missed from school through their illness.

Asthma is more than just a medical condition and affects all areas of children's lives. These problems can't be solved by health professionals alone and it is vital that youth and care workers and educationalists take seriously their responsibilities to children with asthma.

Professor Mike Silverman, Professor of Child Health at Leicester University, and paediatric medical adviser to the National Asthma Campaign, says: 'There is no reason why most children with asthma should be prevented from living a normal life; in the vast majority of cases, asthma can be controlled by avoiding factors which trigger attacks and through sensible use of medication.

For example, it is clear exercise-induced asthma is a problem for many children. However, if children take their regular reliever medication before exercise, they really should experience few problems. PE staff in particular need to be aware that this is a very simple step which will pre-empt difficulty.

Understanding what causes asthma is vitally important but equally important is ensuring that children and their parents receive the best care possible for their asthma.

For any child who has asthma, modern medicine offers disease management aimed at secondary prevention. This means working to minimise the impact of asthma symptoms on daily life, reducing the risk of permanent lung damage and reducing the risk of a child developing a life threatening asthma attack.

Most children with asthma do seem to be better managed now than they were ten years ago.

The National Asthma Campaign is working actively to improve the care and support that children with asthma receive. It is calling on the Government, via the Medical Research Council and the NHS for research into childhood asthma. It also believes that all purchasing authorities and boards should ensure that asthma care is purchased in line with the needs and wishes of the local community. In particular, the following should be addressed:

- All women have the right to be informed of the link between smoking in pregnancy and the development of childhood asthma.
- GPs, who are responsible for the care of the majority of children with asthma, should have the support they require from the hospital sector, including access where necessary to a paediatrician with a special interest in asthma, in accordance with the consensus guidelines developed by the British Thoracic Society.
- All parents should receive written details of their child's treatment, including advice about what to do in the event of an asthma attack. They should also have access to accurate up to date information about asthma medicines including the safety of inhaled steroids and bronchodilators, in accorance with the consensus guidelines.
- Local task forces to be set up to implement nationally-agreed standards of care and to develop local policies on childhood asthma.
- The Department of Health and Scottish Home and Health Department in the face of the new CFC-free inhaler technology, should insist that the new range of devices are simple, easy to use and cover the requirements of children of all ages.
- All schools, sports centres, aeroplanes and other public places should have reliever inhalers and spacers in their first aid boxes. In addition, all adults with a responsibility for a child with asthma should understand the condition and know what to do in the event of an attack.
- Targets should be included in the Government's Health of the Nation and Scottish Health strategies to reduce the burden of childhood asthma on families and the NHS - a reduction in hospital admissions, for example ■

Liz Brodie works as a Press Officer with the National Asthma Campaign

Jonathon's story

Jonathon is 11. He has had asthma since he was five. and is on regular inhaled preventative medication for his condition. His mother, Shona, says that he is determined not to let his asthma stop him doing the things that other children enjoy - he is a very keen footballer - but acknowledges that it has caused him very real problems. 'Last year he wrote to Father Christmas asking for a new pair of lungs,' she says. 'That really upset me - I thought it was so sad. He has learnt to accept his condition but still hates how it affects him.'

Jonathon has experienced considerable problems at school because of his asthma. He has suffered from being called names by other children, and has found some teachers very unsympathetic. This is especially difficult for someone like Jonathon, whose asthma is triggered by stress. His mother has complained about his treatment and has seen it improve as a result, but still says that Jonathon is counting the weeks until he can go to a new school, where he hopes life will be easier.

Leabhar-Leanabain

RAN

Rugadh naoidhean dhomh an-duigh a-staigh
ann an Inbhir Nis
'S chualas ràn fad'às

'S e na ghaoir-uisge
Mu Nead na h-Iolaire

CIOSAN-SGUDAIL

Là breith mo mhic san ospadal
Thug mi seachad a' mhadainn
A' dèanamh dhàn 's gan sadail
Nan ginein dhan chiosan-sgudail
A bha thall anns an oisean
'S mo shùil air an naoidhean
San oisean eil' a dh' aindeoin
Na dhàn 's na mhiorbhail.

VIDEO

Nuair a thàinig tu dhan t-saoghal
Bha mi airson video
A dhèanamh, 's a chumadh tu ri do bheò,
Air na bha dol 's tu nad chreathall,
Ris an sealladh tu, 's dòcha
Là dhe na làithean
Ach 's e bu mhiann leam amas air 's fhaicinn
Na bha thu faicinn le do mhac-meanma.

BAS AGUS BEATHA

Chan eil am bàs agus a' bheatha
Cho fada sin bho chèile:

'S e an dearbh dhuine
A bh' anns an lighiche a thug mo mhacsa slàn
'S am fear a mhol gun d'rachadh cur às dha
O chionn mu naoi mìosan.

CAINNT MO MHIC

Cha tog mi le mo chainnt fhèin thu, 'ille
Gun fhios nach cuir e uallach air do chridhe
Agus a' chainnt a' dol bàs
Ach le cainnt a' chumantais.

AS DEIDH BREITH MO MHIC

Saoghal fallain ort is beartas!
Do bheatha dhan dùthaich!
Cha mhòr gun tug thu do bheò às
Fhir bhig ghaolaich!

Ach na gabh iomagain idir
Oir a rèir luchd feng-shui tha beartas is dìon
An cois an taighe 's aghaidh ris a' mhuir
'S aig a bheil air a chùlaibh cnocan
Agus sealladh
A-muigh air a bheulaibh.

Rinn mi meòrachadh air sin nam aonar
San taigh-sheinnse feasgar
'S gu goirid às a dhèidh nochd duine
'S theann e air mo bhuaireadh leis a' phuggy
machine.

A' COIMHEAD RI T'AODANN

Bidh mi coimhead ri t' aodann
'S gun fhios aig duin' againn

Co dhiubh 's e ràinail no lachanaich
No cur-a-mach no mèaranach tha romhad

An crochadh air a' mheud
A tha nad bhalg a-staigh:

Shin sinn! Thusa ann an shin gun anail,
Gun bhìog às do bheul

'S mise gabhail orm gu bheil mi tuigsinn
Mar a bhios na rudan seo a' dol.

BUILLE-CHRIDHE

Bidh mi gad luasgadh nad chreathall
Gus an ruig thu air tàmh is cadal

'S an fhuaim às mar a' bhuille-chridhe
A thog thu 'n creathall na bruinne.

BALACH BEAG

Thàinig balach beag a chèilidh
Air do mhàthair 's ort fhèin
'S thusa nad leanaban
Na do laigh' air do leabaidh

'S cha e b' e guirme do shùilean
No ruadhadh do chlaiginn
No am miastadh mu do bhus
No finealtachd do làmhan, fiù 's

A b' adhbhar-annais
Don fhear òg
Ach dìreach cho beag
'S a bha thu air fàs.

LEINTEAN

Cùm umad do lèine-shona
Fad trì fichead bliadhna
(Air a' char as lugha)

'S às dèidh dhut tighinn an aois
Dèan rèiteach air do chneas
Airson do lèine-bhàis.

SGRUDADH

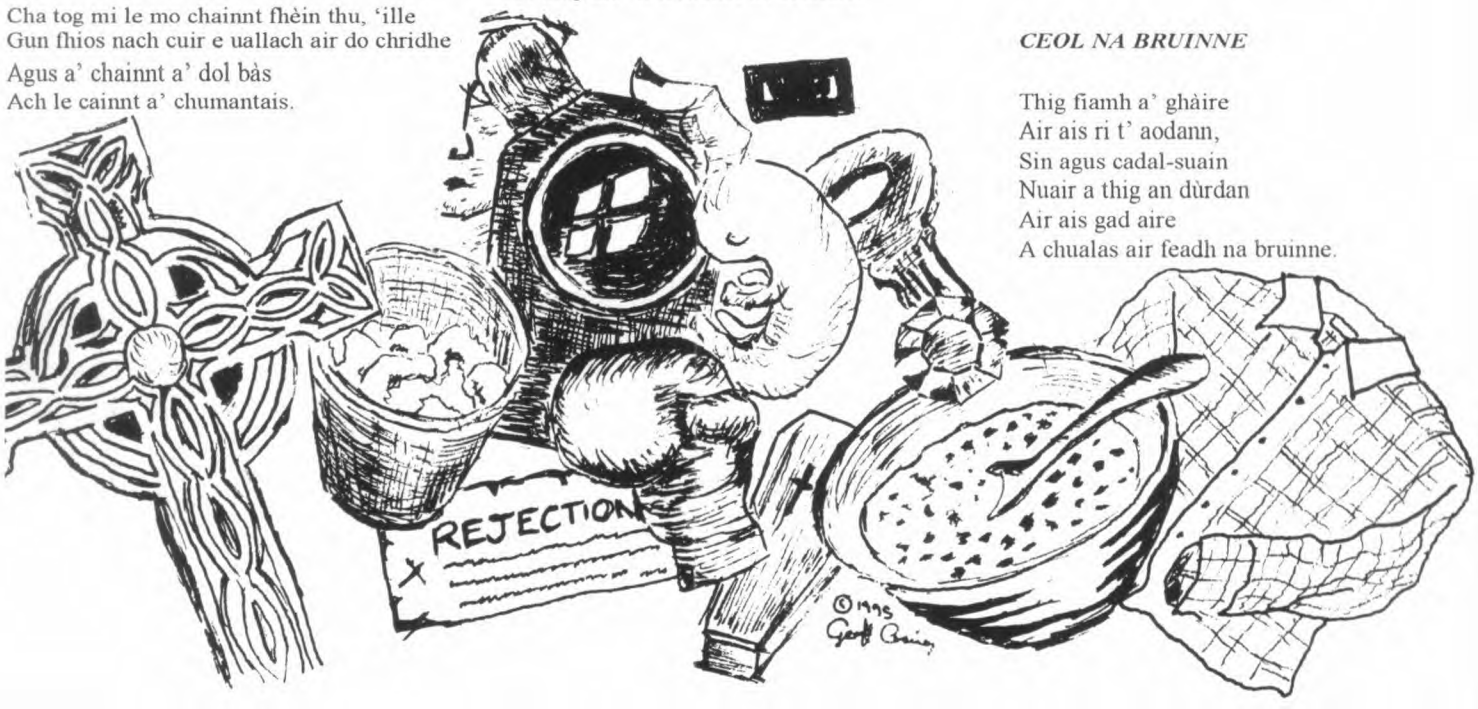
Rinn iad do thomhas
'S do chuideam a mheas
'S chuir iad ceann-latha ris.

Rinn iad sgrùdadh cuideachd
Air an teodhachd agad
'S chuir iad bileagan
Mu do chasan.

Taigh na galla dhaibh!
Oir cha robh feum riamh
Air teisteanas-tàrmachaidh
Aig daoimean gun truailleadh.

CEOL NA BRUINNE

Thig fiamh a' ghàire
Air ais ri t' aodann,
Sin agus cadal-suain
Nuair a thig an dùrdan
Air ais gad aire
A chualas air feadh na bruinne.



new voices, new writing

le Rody Gorman

DO SHEUMAS MUN NOLLAIG

Bha mi goil mhuileagan
'S iad ag at 's a' dol an deirge
Gus an do bhrùchd iad nam brag air mo bheulaibh
'S ghabh mi beachd an uair sin air t' aodann
As dèidh dhut dùsgadh
Madainn Là na Nollaige.

LAOIDH-LEABAIDH

Mura tèid thu a chadal
Am priobadh nan sùl,
Cuiridh mi mar fhiachaibh ort, a laochain,
An sgudal seo a leughadh
Os àrd agus air beulaibh
Do chàirdean is do nàimhdean.

SAN T-SEOMAR SAOTHAIR-CHLOINNE

Shaoileam
Gun robh mi eòlach anns na cnuic
Aig meud mo shiubhail air feadh na beinne
Gus an latha ud san t-seòmar saothair-chloinne
Aig breith mo mhic
Nuair a nochd e romham bhon dorchadas
Na shuaicheantas
Agus na Mheall Gorm.

DAN GUN IARRAIDH

Agus dùil ri leanaban agam mar dhàn gun iarraidh
Agus làithean saor' an t-samhraidh
A' teannadh chun an deiridh

Shaoileam nach nochdainn a bheag a dh' fhaireachdainn
Nuair a nochdadh an rudan
A machlaig a ghineamhainn

('S ann air duanaire beag agam a bha m' aire
A bha mi feuchainn ri chur anns a' chlò
'S dhan nochd bileag-obaidh ann am post na maidne)

Gun fhiosam nan tigeadh e beò
Nach cinneadh e 's nach d'rachadh e leth rium
Mar a rachadh dàn sa chainnt seo leth agam.

GUIDHE

Chuirinn suas ùrnaigh ri beatha mo leanaibh
Ach nach eil agam de dh' uidheam chreideimh

'S e dhùraiginn na h-àite
Beatha dha na slàinte

'S biadh a' chladaich 's balgam
Dhen uisge-bheatha ri anam.

BOIDHEAN

Fuirich air mo ghlùin tacan
Ach an luaisg mi thu a bhòidhein
Mus fhàs thu nad bhall de ghlùin
Nach aithnich mo sheòrsa fhèin.

DEALBH DATHTE

Nochd thu romham nad dhealbh
An là a chaidh do bhreith

'S dearg is gorm ri do chraiceann
('S gu h-àraid mu t' aodann)

'S ùire do ghnùise
Air ùire na gile

'S ruadh a' togail ceann
Mu chlaban do chinn

'S dubh 's uain' air an deasachadh mu do chom
Nan tranche de mheconium

'S chan eil fhios dè 'n dath nad bhroinn
No an dath nad inntinn.

GLAS

'S ann a chuir sinn glas a-raoir
Air doras do sheòmair

A dh' aona ghnothaich gus na cait
A chumail a-mach, rud nach b' àbhaist

Gus thu fhèin a dhìon
As bith càit' am bi thu na bhroinn.

Tha mi 'n dòchas nach cuir sinn
An aon ghlas oirnn fhin.

SUILEAN

Dh'fhosgail thu do shùilean
As dèidh trì mìosan
('S tu nad shùilean ceart an uair sin)
'S thug thu sùil
Mun cuairt ort air an t-saoghal:
Dè air domhan tha seo, saoil?

GUTHAN BHON T-SEOMAR

Chuala mi guthan
Bhon t-seòmar shìos fodhainn
Nuair a dhùisg me sa mhadainn

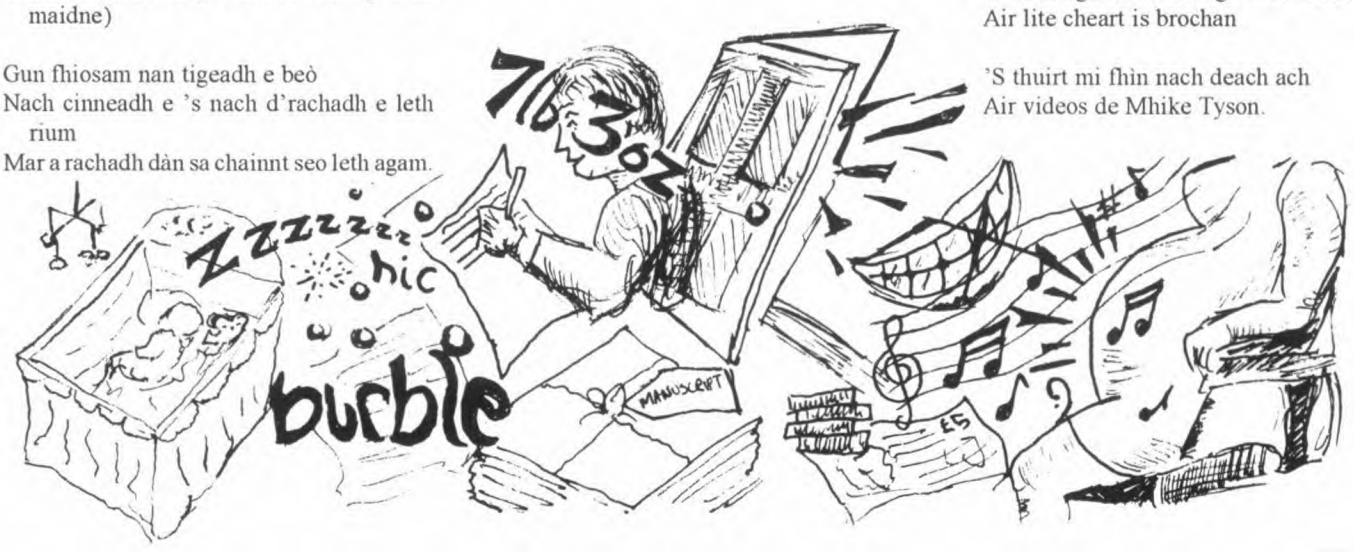
Ach nach robh ann
Ach thu fhèin nad chotan ri srann
Sa chainnt a th' agad fhèin.

LITE'S BROCHAN

Thuirt bodach
As dèidh dha mo mhac fhaicinn:

'S eudar gun deach an gill' ud àrach
Air lite cheart is brochan

'S thuirt mi fhìn nach deach ach
Air videos de Mhike Tyson.



new voices, new writing

by Rody Gorman

BABY BOOK

CRY

A wee baby boy was born to me today in Inverness
And a cry was heard far away

Like a wailing in the mountain
Near the Eagle's Nest.

WASTE PAPER BASKET

The day my son was born in the hospital
I spent the morning
Writing poems and throwing them
Like foetuses into the waste paper basket
That was over in the corner
With my eye on the baby
In the other corner in spite of everything
A poem and a miracle.

VIDEO

When you came into the world
I wanted to make a video
Which you could keep for the rest of your life
About what was happening as you lay in your cot
Which you would look at maybe
Some fine day
But what I was really aiming for and would like to see
Is what you were seeing in your imagination.

LIFE AND DEATH

Life and death
Aren't that far apart:

The doctor who delivered my son
Is one and the same
As the man who advised getting rid of him
About nine months ago.

MY SON'S SPEECH

I won't bring you up with my own speech, son
In case it puts a burden on your heart
As the speech is dying
But with the speech of commonality.

AFTER MY SON'S BIRTH

Healthy life and wealth to you!
Welcome on board!
You nearly didn't make it
Beloved little mannie!

But don't worry at all
For according to feng-shui folk wealth and protection
Are associated with houses facing the sea
And with hills behind them
And a nice view
In front.

I considered that on my own
In the pub this afternoon
And shortly afterwards some bloke appeared
And started giving me grief with the puggy machine

LOOKING AT YOUR FACE

I look at your face
Without either of us knowing

Whether you are going to
Cry or laugh or yawn

Depending on the amount
That's in your belly:

There we go! You there without breath,
Without a peep out of you

And me letting on I understand
How these things go.

HEARTBEAT

I rock you in your cot
Until you reach sleep and rest

With a noise like the heartbeat
You picked up in the cradle of the womb.

WEE BOY

A wee boy came visiting
Your mother and yourself
When you were a little baby
Lying on your bed

And it wasn't the blueness of your eyes
Or the redness of your skull
Or the mischief in your face
Or the daintiness of your hands, even,

At which the young man marvelled
But just how little
You had become.

SHIRTS

Keep on your lucky shirt
For sixty years
(At least)

And after aging
Prepare your skin
For your death shirt.

EXAMINATION

They measured you
And calculated your weight
And dated it.

They also examined
Your temperature
And they put labels
Around your feet.

Bugger them!
There was never a pure diamond
Which needed
A certificate of origin.

THE MUSIC OF THE WOMB

A smile
Returns to your face
And sleep
When you become conscious
Of the murmur
Which was heart throughout the womb.

FOR SEUMAS AT CHRISTMAS

I was boiling cranberries
As they swelled and grew redder
Until they erupted with a pop before me
And I thought of your face
After you had woken
On Christmas morning.

LULLABY

If you don't go to sleep
In the flash of an eye
I will compel you, boyo,
To read this drivel
Out loud and in front of
Your friends and your enemies.

IN THE LABOUR WARD

I thought
That I knew the hills
Having travelled so much throughout the moors
Until that day in the labour ward
At the birth of my son
When he appeared before me from the dark
A wonder
And a Blue Stack.

UNWANTED POEM

Expecting a child like an unsolicited poem
As the summer holidays
Drew to a close

I though that I wouldn't show any feeling
To the wee thing
When it appeared from the bag of its conception

(I was preoccupied with an anthology
I was trying to have published
For which a rejection slip arrived this morning)

Not knowning if he came through it all
That he would grow on me
Like a poem in this speech half mine.

PRAYER

I would pray for the life of my son
But I have no religious equipment.

What I would wish instead for him
Is life in health

With the food of the shore and a drop
Of whisky in his belly.

BEAUTIFUL BOYO

Stay on my knee for a while
So that I can rock you boyo
Before you become part of a generation/ knee
That the likes of me doesn't recognize/
That doesn't recognize the likes of me.

COLOUR PICTURE

You appeared before me like a picture
The day that you were born

With red and blue in your skin
(And especially about your face)

And brown beginning to appear
About your cranium

And black and green prepared about your waist
Like a trenche of meconium

And heaven knows what colour inside you
Or in your mind.

LOCK

We locked the door
Of your room last night

Deliberately to keep the cats out
Which we never used to

To protect you
Wherever you are inside.

I hope
We don't apply the same lock to ourselves.

EYES/BOY CHILD AFTER THREE MONTHS OF AGE WHEN HE OPENS HIS EYES AND LOOKS ABOUT HIM

You opened your eyes
After three months
(A proper little shùilean then)
And you looked
About you at the world:
What's going on here, then?

VOICES FROM THE ROOM

I heard voices
From the room below us
When I woke up this morning

But all it was
Was you snoring in your cot
In your own language.

PORRIDGE AND BROSE

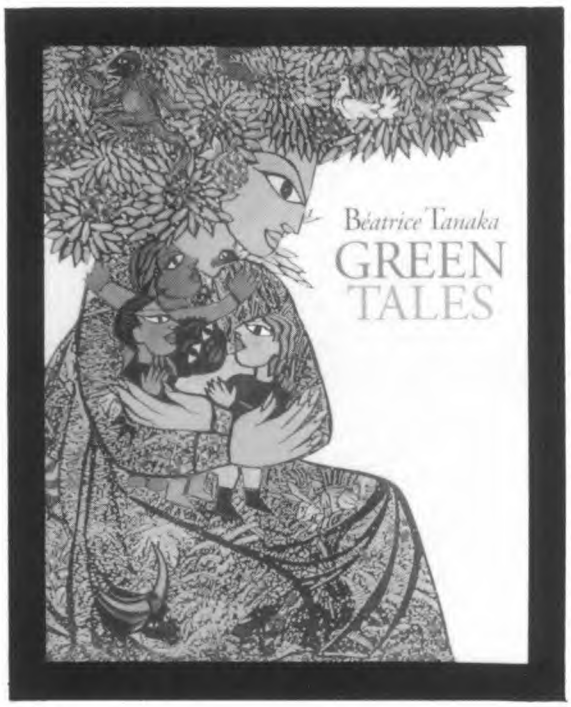
The old boy said
After he had seen my son:

I bet that boy was reared
On proper porridge and brose

And I said he wasn't but
On videos of Mike Tyson.

Children's *books for* Christmas

by **John Hunter**



The other day I read a review of the new Disney full-length feature cartoon 'Pocahontas'. Though the film is aimed mainly at children, the review was written by an adult and for my money it completely missed the point. The reviewer panned the film on the basis that it was not historically accurate, politically correct or musically original.

Ask any group of children coming out of the cinema having seen 'Pocahontas' what they thought of it and I suggest you'll get a completely different story. Kids, by and large, just ain't interested in historical accuracy, political correctness or musical originality. They go to the flicks to be entertained and that's just what 'Pocahontas' does.

This illustrates a problem for adults reviewing products aimed exclusively at children. How do you get inside a child's head and feel what they feel, think what they think? Answer: you can't and don't. What you can - and possibly do - do is ask kids what you think of the product before you write some ridiculous adult view that has no relevance to its principal consumers.

This problem is faced by book reviewers when reviewing books aimed at children - specifically *me* when writing about the three books to be reviewed here, **Green Tales** by Beatrice Tanaka, **A Spark in the Dark** by Richard Tichnor and Jenny Smith, and **Dread and Delight - A Century of Children's Ghost Stories** edited by Philippa Pearce. To get round it, I gave the first two books to my two daughters and asked for their comments. The third I kept all for myself, thus proving my own hypocrisy.

Green Tales, according to the cover blurb, is a selection of 'eight magical myths from around the world...each of which illustrates the importance of an ecological mindset... The tales emphasize the link between humans and all living things, and serve as a reminder that all our actions carry consequences - sometimes dangerous ones.'

My 13-year-old daughter Sarah 'loved the pictures' which were 'so creative' with 'a lot of detail and an interesting style'. The stories she found 'strong and full of life'. Though at first glance, she said, she might not have liked this book - '**Green Tales** is not a captivating title' - she found it inspirational. 'It gets you thinking.'

'This is a nice book to read to your kids, aged seven and upwards. They will enjoy looking at the complicated pictures and marvel about life they get from this book. There is a subtle moral buried inside, just telling you we have a beautiful world and not to spoil it. Simple.'

A Spark in the Dark I gave to my 11-year-old daughter Rachael, who found it 'a strange book'. This is a story of creation, in which the authors 'hope to remind people of what we all know but tend to forget in our everyday lives: that we all come from something larger than ourselves and that we are all related in this way'.

The first time Rachael read it she thought it made no sense, 'but now I think it's a story of what's going around in the author's mind and maybe some people might think it's a story of how God created the earth and created more and more. The person that wrote this has a very wild imagination and I think in some ways this story is true if you look at it in an imaginative way.'

Dread and Delight is the book I kept to myself - and I will probably continue to keep (and to use) because it's full of delightfully scary ghost stories of just the sort that parents will read to their kids in a half-darkened room during the winter. The stories are arranged chronologically, beginning with examples from the earliest years of the 20th century by M R James, A C Benson and H F W Tatham, schoolmasters all (Etonian schoolmasters at that), who apparently told these tales to their pupils round winter fires. The most recent of the tales in this book were first published in

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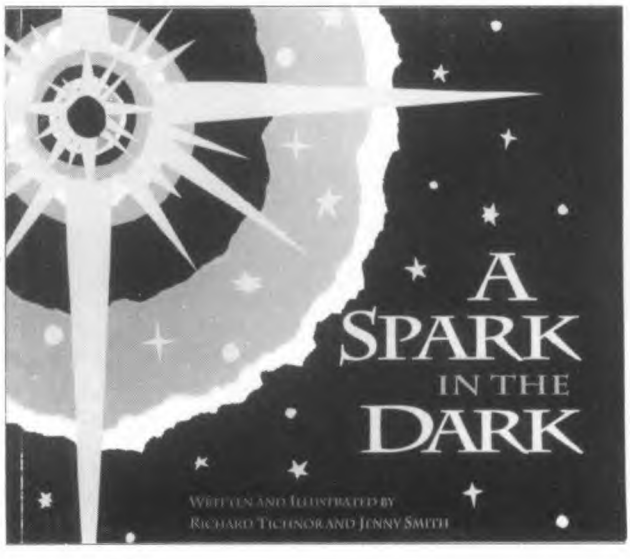


A Guid Cause

The Women's Suffrage Movement in Scotland

Leah Leneman, Mercat Press £14.99

Reviewed by Rosemary Milne

My mother was born in 1913. All her life she had a firm belief that you should exercise your right to vote. She gave me and my sisters a sense that, especially for women whose right to be counted was so hard won and so recently, voting is more than a right - it's a duty. She entered the world when the suffrage movement was already well established among women north and south of the border. I often wonder how much she was aware, as a small child growing up in Yorkshire, of the battle being waged by the women who figure in this book.

As Leah Leneman points out in this new revised edition of **A Guid Cause**, (incorporating fresh material, one assumes, although this is not made clear), there exists several histories of the Suffragette Movement in England. But the emphasis on London and the Pankhursts has led to a neglect of the lively movement which took hold up here in Scotland and had its own heroines and a few heroes too for good measure.

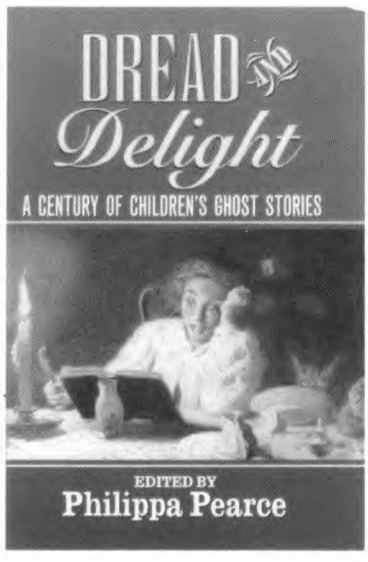
Leneman's book is a useful corrective to this situation. It covers the earliest stirrings right through to the eventual victory as the First World War ended. Each decade brought more activists: Louisa Lumsden from Aberdeen, Jenny McCallum of Inverkeithing, Grace Paterson of Glasgow, Jane Taylour from Stranraer, Elsie Inglis in Edinburgh and hundreds of others up and down the country.

Like any history of political emancipation this book charts the ebb and flow of argument, between groups and political parties, between sister organisations and splintering factions. There were plenty of opportunities for disagreement in what seemed to many as a campaign against some kind of God-given natural order. Some men were especially vexed by it and we can judge what they were like when you watch the modern-day contortions of the 'no women priests' lobby. Another of those bible-bound, 'God-given' proscriptions under which women have laboured for so long.

Still it would be a mistake, as the author demonstrates, to write men's contribution off entirely. Men from Glasgow and Edinburgh, and a few from the north of England travelled south to see Asquith in the summer of 1913. Asquith refused to see them but they met the Scottish MPs who seem to have shown themselves in a very poor

Children's *books for* Christmas Contd.

the early 1990s by authors such as Susan Price, Tim Wynne-Jones and John Gordon (all less aggressively upper middle class than their Etonian counterparts from earlier in the century).



Published by the Oxford University Press, **Dread & Delight** is sure to be a favourite among children - and adults - for this Christmas and beyond.

Green Tales by Beatrice Tanaka is published by Four Walls Eight Windows, New York, and is distributed in the UK by Turnaround. Price: £10.95.

A Spark in the Dark by Richard Tichnor and Jenny Smith is available in the UK through Deep Books Ltd. Price: £5.99.

Dread & Delight Edited by Philippa Pearce is published by the Oxford University Press. Price: £17.99 ■

Motherhood *from 1920 to the* present day

Edited by Vivien Devlin

Polygon £11.95

Reviewed by Diane Devlin

Motherhood From 1920 to the Present Day is a collection of oral histories on thinking about, having, feeding and life after babies. This book gives a diversity of opinion on all of the above. As a mother and thus a member of the relevant group, I acknowledge similar thoughts on the subject. My problem with this book is the fact that women talking about their mothering lives should *breathe*.

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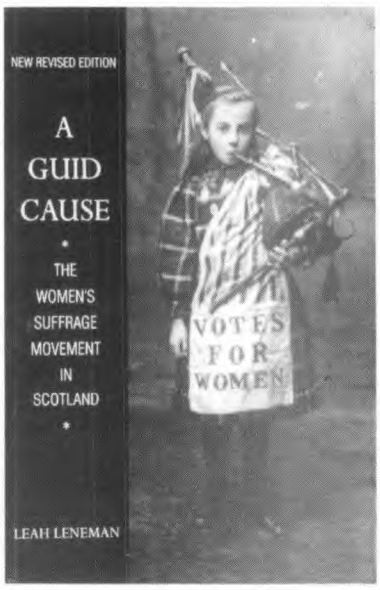
light. From an early date some Scottish men were unequivocal in their support of women's fight to get the vote.

But that is only a fraction of this detailed and fascinating period. The vigour of the suffragette movement in Scotland as much as in England was due in large part to the actions and determination of that emerging force for change: professional, or at least educated, middle-class women activists. They simply refused to take no for an answer.

Reading this book I kept being reminded of visits I made to Greenham Common where another bunch of women also refused to go back home and behave.

Here, for example is just one incident described in chapter 9, 'Ye Mauna Tramp on the Scottish Thistle'. That slogan became the motto of the Edinburgh branch of the Women's Freedom League.

'On July 24 at 2. am a Glasgow police constable passing along Park Gardens discovered a woman inside Number 6, along with firelighters and paraffin, and suffrage literature. A few hours later another woman, covered in soot, was captured trying to escape from the house. She said she was 'Margaret Morrison'; the other woman refused to give her name. They were taken to Duke Street prison and immediately went on hunger strike. 'Margaret Morrison' smashed the glass in her cell and was removed to a strong cell. She demanded her rights as an unconvicted prisoner and knocked the prison governor's hat off because he 'dared to stand in the presence of a lady with it on...'

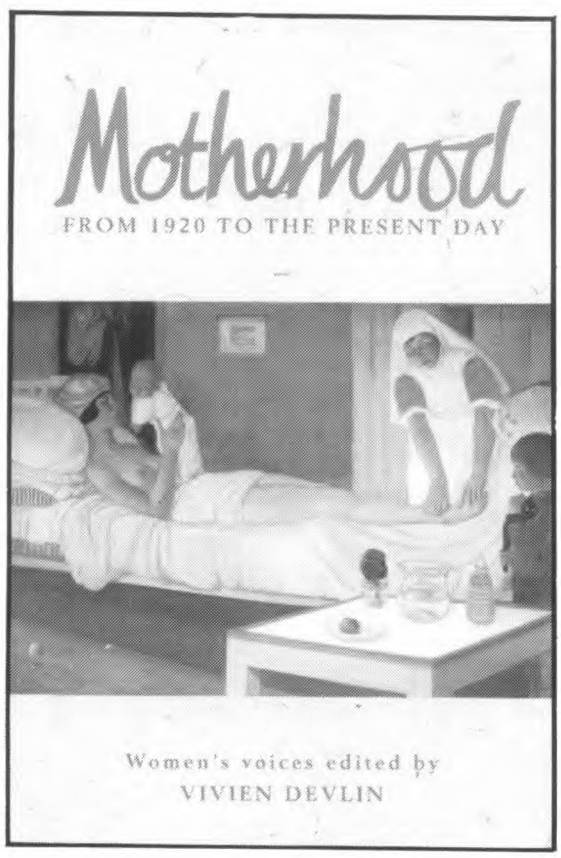


Arson attacks were regularly used by suffragists to draw attention to their cause. One of the most famous, described in chapter 10, 'The Heather On Fire', was the torching of three mansion houses in Perthshire on the same night in early 1914. Two of the houses, Leneman tells us, were completely destroyed.

In much the same way as I found myself in awe and admiration at some of the more extreme acts of daring and lawlessness at Greenham, reading this book I marvelled again at the vision and sheer bloody-mindedness of these women who exasperated and finally defeated the Establishment. I wonder what they would have made of our lackadaisical attitude to voting nowadays? I wonder how they would have felt about the turnouts of less than 50 per cent for local elections, the political apathy and the spurious sound-bite mouthings of our political leaders.

My guess is that they'd say, 'get off your backsides and *do* something about it'. The lesson I and my sisters learnt from our mother was that at very least women must use their vote.

Perhaps when you've finished with **A Guid Cause**, you'll vow never again to let an election day go by without putting your cross in a box. Then those women will have been vindicated - and Leneman too who has done a sound research job on a too little celebrated area of Scottish women's achievement ■



The editor Vivien Devlin gives us these 'women's voices' but because it's words on the page rather than oral storytelling the subject matter - which is undoubtedly important - becomes in my view ordinary, and the 390 pages become a mountain to climb. Women's commentaries are interlaced with professional women writers' fictional or factual accounts of motherhood in all its many guises. This was the part of the book which I most enjoyed: I must confess to finding the oral histories at times uninspiring. They do not do justice to the subject matter.

Are you one of these women? Do you love reliving your pregnancy, birth and feeding/weaning experiences? If so, you might be better doing it over a cup of coffee. If this sounds ever so slightly scathing it's not really meant to be.

In the voices behind the words, women get support from each other. The ways in which we mother our children change, but are somehow the same. There is a tinge of anecdotal coffee morning about this book. It is also full of truisms: children bring pleasure and pain; the telephone is used in 1995 instead of congregating at the village pump.

The front cover, which shows a painting entitled 'Romance' by Cecile Walton, encapsulates the antithetical image of motherhood and certainly brings to life one aspect of the subject.

There is a great deal said in this book by women who are or have been mothers. The important question is was it written for their own catharsis: if so it will have been worthwhile. If not, maybe it was written for women who have not had children because we who have heard it all before and no doubt will hear it again in the clinic, coffee shop, pub or wherever - but we will collectively share the tears and laughter and not have to read it. This highlights the main flaw in the book for me - it depersonalises the stories behind mothering ■

Reviews Editor: **Elaine Henry**, ***Wordpower***, Edinburgh.

Waiton

'I'd like Sonic 2 and Claire will have.. .what do you want Claire?'

No reply. 'Claire will have Sonic 1,' Mary said. I took the Sega games out of my drawer and handed them both to Mary - Claire's tiny but loud five-year-old twin sister.

Claire and Mary regularly use the drop-in centre that I run and every time it's the same story: Mary talks for and makes decisions for her sister. Mary, by taking the lead all the time, is growing up, learning to make decisions and to fend for herself. Claire, on the other hand, timid quiet Claire, has got used to her own mute defenceless existence. It's even getting to the stage that Mary is not just acting, but is *looking* older than her identical twin.

A lot of primary school children use my centre. Most of them are pretty sussed, either from being street-wise (literally) or because their parents have given them the space to look after themselves a bit. However there are two boys, Patrick and John, whom I see from time to time, generally accompanied by their mother who, like Claire, are clearly outsiders. They're both a bit awkward and nervous of the other children and usually sit next to me if one of their parents is out of the room. Their parents are over-protective towards them and as a result Patrick and John are at a disadvantage in developing relations with their peer group - a group that is no doubt sometimes childish, nasty and spiteful but is their peer group none the less.

Boys will be boys, and for that matter girls will also be girls - name calling, hair pulling, fighting and all the rest of it. They do it today, they did it yesterday and they'll do it tomorrow - it's simply part of growing up and, let's face it, we've all been on the giving and receiving end at some time in our childhood and we've all come through it with a few bad memories and a few good ones.

These experiences - learning to get along with your own age group - are as important a process as the experiences you have with your family. The lopsided relationships between Mary and Claire, and Patrick and John with their mother, will with time iron themselves out - especially through the experience of school.

School has a huge influence upon us as kids - the first day back, making our way there, making friends, making enemies, playtime games, playtime fights, hating your teachers, getting your first girlfriend or boyfriend, the list is endless.

Starting secondary school was my most traumatic time. I was the hard man from my junior school and had to face various challenges from little hard men from other schools that fed Preston High. I decided not to take up any of these offers and made friends with a fat kid called Kippas. Kippas was a bit too soft for his own good and on occasion would start crying when the 'fatty' jokes went too far. His crying meant he was not only fat but, as far as the other kids were concerned, a complete loser as well.

However by the time we left school I had come through it having had only one fight, which I won, and Kippas, who was even fatter by then, had learnt how to deal with the blubber-guts jibes and was a very witty and popular young man.

The examples above may not apply to all kids. All fat kids probably don't become Chubby Browns and not all quiet kids grow up to be Arnies (as in Schwarzenegger), but as much as possible, unless the child in question is being torn limb from limb, the last thing any kids needs is a teacher holding his hand throughout his school life.

But trying telling that to the Bullying Brigade that is sweeping into our schools.

This lot already has a £500,000 grant from the Department of Education in England, £170,000 worth of research expenditure, booklets, videos and training courses available for the 23,000 schools in England - and now they've come to Strathclyde.

A 16,000 pupil survey has just been completed and the shock findings show that kids do indeed call each other fatty and - could it be true? - they don't like it!

The *Times Educational Supplement* reported that there were 'bullies in every classroom' going to say that 'at least one (pupil) in every class is experiencing acute difficulties because of bullying'. The Glasgow *Evening Times* ran the headline 'Pupils victims of mental cruelty' under which they observed that 'Research found the trouble was not caused by older children inflicting physical pain on younger ones. The worst damage was caused by children making cruel verbal attacks on victims the same age.'

Alan Train (*The Bullying Problem*, 1995) claims that 'fists and grimaces can be particularly effective, and as they are made in silence they carry much less risk for the bully'. He goes on to say that 'bullies often do nothing particularly noteworthy...what they do not do may constitute their tactic...they do not speak to their victims'. So if you ever gave a classmate a nasty look or sent a friend to Coventry for the day you too are a torturer guilty of 'mental cruelty'!

Like the fear of crime, which is many times greater than the reality, the panic about bullying is more damaging than the so-called bullying itself. Rather than learning how to get along with each other, children from the age of four are being encouraged to tell tales on their classmates. In Kent, for example, a 12-year-old boy (the son of a Liberal Democrat councillor) was praised by his local newspaper for involving the police in his anti-bullying campaign.

Teaching Claire, Patrick and John to deal with their classmates by telling teacher and going for counselling may be described as a form of empowerment but is in reality a lesson in dependence. Growing up, becoming independent, learning to cope on your own - all this only happens once we stop relying on other people to look after us.

Stopping the kids from calling Kippas fatso may have given him some short-term comfort, but if they had he'd probably still be crying today ■

Stuart Waiton

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January / February 1996

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