

Journal of Adolescent Health & Welfare

VOLUME 2 NO 4 WINTER 1989

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CHARITY NO 296080

Letter from the Editor

Dear Colleague,

Here we are again at the end of another year - well, more importantly, at the beginning of another new year - in fact a new decade!

Thank you to all the people who have helped keep things going this year - the journal circulation is now over 600, very encouraging, and I hope it will continue to rise. This is unfortunately also that time of year when I have to remind everyone about subscriptions, I know it is a pain but unfortunately we do have to ask you all for your £20. Of course some kind souls paid two years in advance last year so to them, thanks very much and ignore this reminder.

Christmas is of course a time when charities put on a big effort but I sometimes feel that it also brings, as Bob Geldof calls it, 'compassion fatigue', so Youth Support are not making any particular Christmas appeal but we are getting some toys for the nursery from Capital Radio foyer.

Our next fund raising effort is a small one on new year's day - so as to start the decade with pneumonia, we are having the ice break swim! All welcome to join in - details on the next page. It will be a splendid opportunity to work off some of those extra calories - the colder it is, the more calories your body will need to burn off in order for you to survive in the water! And of course the dip will be a wonderful cure for thje new year's eve hangover - hope you are coming to the party!

We are including the remaining speeches from the 19th October meeting in this issue with the transcript of some of the discussion. In the last issue we advertised the Dublin meeting of rehabilitation International in may 1990. If anyone wants further information, please write in. We are trying to arrange for a Youth Support group to go to Dublin so please let me know if you want to be included.

Other news - Youth Support House is coming along well, we have the basics done now and should be opening on schedule on 1st January 1990 - we still need a few items of furniture and could do with some help to get a 'safe play area' - one with wood chips underfoot; also we need second hand computer equipment and any ideas on how we can borrow a minibus for the first two weeks in january?

Staff changes on our committee - Geoff Ball has left us and retired up north - we welcome Sheila Pope as chairperson of our nursery committee.

Finally I wish you all happy christmas and a very prosperous new year!

Dr Diana Birch MBBS DCH MRCP MD
Director "YOUTH SUPPORT".

Patrons: Dame Josephine Barnes; Sir Frank Mills.

CHARITY NO 296080

APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP OR RENEWAL OF THE "YOUTH SUPPORT"
"FORUM ON ADOLESCENT HEALTH AND WELFARE"

PLEASE COMPLETE IN BLOCK CAPITALS AND SEND to:-
YOUTH SUPPORT 30 Crystal Palace Park Road SE26 6UG
Cheques payable to YOUTH SUPPORT

I would like to join /renew my membership of the "FORUM ON ADOLESCENT HEALTH AND WELFARE" I enclose £20 registration fee which covers one years membership (journal included in cost).

NAME POSITION.....
ADDRESS.....
.....
..... PHONE.....



EVENTS

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GRAND NEW YEAR'S EVE PARTY!
COME AND DANCE INTO THE NEXT DECADE,
SET THE PACE FOR THE NINETIES,
HOUSEWARM OUR NEW CENTRE,

ON SUNDAY 31ST DECEMBER 1989 AT 8.30pm
AT "YOUTH SUPPORT HOUSE"
13, CRESCENT ROAD,
BECKENHAM BR3 2NF

RSVP TO HEAD OFFICE AT 30 CRYSTAL PALACE PARK ROAD 659 3309 / 659 7931

* * * * *

ANOTHER FIRST FOR YOUTH SUPPORT!
ICE BREAK SWIM ON MONDAY 1ST JANUARY 1990



MR. PICKWICK SLIDES

.....The things we do for charity!

No, we're not completely mad but on Monday 1st January 1990 at 1pm - we will be attempting a sponsored
ICE BREAK SWIM!...

you may wish to - Join us and get sponsors yourself

- sponsor us
- come and watch (jeer) - bring your own rum toddies!
- or - give us a donation to humour our mad attempt

Swim will take place at :- 136, Court Lane, Dulwich, London SE21 - please ring beforehand 01 659 7931 or 01 659 3309 if you wish to come. Report at 12.45 please and bring your own towels etc. Swimmers will need a helper with a hot drink and towel waiting for them! There are no facilities for refreshments at that address but all swimmers will be welcome to come back to Youth Support for sustenance and resuscitation afterwards!

If you live far away - why not organise a local swim at the same time?

Sponsors will pledge an amount per LENGTH and per DEGREE FAHRENHEIT below 70F (that being average indoor pool temperature). So for instance if you pledge £1 and your swimmer does 2 lengths at a temperature of 48F (last year's reading) - you pay 2 X (70-48=22) = £44 OK? This year may well be colder than last - it is difficult for swimmers to do more than two lengths, because your muscles seize up!

SPONSORSHIP FORM

Name

Address Tel No

I wish to help deprived young people by joining in the "ICE BREAK SWIM" on 1.1.90. My sponsors are:-

Sponsor	Amount pledged per degree/ length	Temp F	lengths	TOTAL

"Teenage Poverty and 'welfare' benefits and rights"

ANDREW KNOPS - London regional representative for "Child Poverty Action Group" (CPAG)

I am here to talk about benefits or lack of benefits for the young these days. Youth, poverty and deprivation. Among teenagers and youth, we find all the general causes of poverty such as unemployment, disability without sufficient support and lack of earnings. It is close to reaching a situation in this country at the moment where because of the discrimination that exists against young people - often totally unfounded - we are getting to a stage where almost being young is a cause of poverty in itself.

The legislation is very complex but I think it is important to go through the main points because there is a lot that we can do ourselves in providing advice. Also it is important when anyone is dealing with young people to know just what the financial side is, and what kind of financial support they can expect, both while you are seeing them in an institution or outside that when they try and make out for their own independence. It is this independence or lack of it which is forced on people. A lack of independence, that the lack of state support perpetuates, that is really scandalous. When early on in life they try to find their way without some kind of financial support, it has increasingly happened that individuals are forced into employments or career paths or life patterns which they would really rather not follow and this lasts right throughout their life and can lead to all sort of problems later on.

At the moment those who are between 16 and 17 are generally not entitled to income support at all. This was brought in with the Social Security Act changes in 1986 which became effective in April 1988. It did lead to an uproar especially in the case of those who were estranged - had left home - and therefore their primary source of financial support - and for reasons not of their own desiring - they had left because they really could not stay - they were suffering abuse - quite a number of that kind of case - and they were still being cut back from any kind of state benefit. The one exception was if you went on to a youth training scheme where you could get £40 per week - this was all well and good and it forced kids into training - and I say forced - it was not a proper wage that was being paid and they were being asked to do work without prospects. As it turned out, the result was worse than that, they didn't just have a limited choice of what kind of scheme they went on to; there was a also 30,000 shortfall in the places. These places were supposed to have been guaranteed so such a shortfall was scandalous! The Government was

forced to acknowledge this and they were also forced to acknowledge various other categories in the situation where this rule of 16 and 17 year olds being disqualified from benefit simply on the ground of their age had to be waived and there now stands the following; If they are following the YTS that still holds but there is slightly more of a choice; Those who because of their personal circumstances cannot be expected to undergo training (this includes lone parents and members of a couple who have children); those incapable of work and training (only when that is likely to last 12 months or more) and those who are registered blind - women more than 6 months pregnant; persons caring for a sick elderly relatives and certain categories of refugees.

It is important to bear in mind that although the government have made these concessions and it took extreme pressure just to do that, that just gets individuals over the first hurdle, the age hurdle. They still have to satisfy all the remaining conditions that generally apply to the payment of income support - and that is the basic minimum that the Government says no one should fall below. In the past you had to prove yourself available for work and case law had interpreted the word availability to be an active state rather than a passive state - it was not enough just to wait around and hope that some employer would seek you out you had to draw attention to the fact that you were seeking work - and that included things like looking through newspapers etc etc - going to sign on at the Job Centre or whatever - but that has been tightened up very much more and they have now statutorily defined actively seeking work

There are a number of steps such as looking in newspapers, there must be at least 2 to 3 steps must be taken per week and there must be proof of these given. Some forms of seeking work will be very difficult to prove, for instance if you work in a specialist area then it would be a good idea just to ask on the specialist grapevine about vacancies and personal contacts can be as valuable as anything else, or if you are in an unskilled profession like dock work, turning up outside the factory gates at the start of the week is the recognised practice for getting that kind of employment - those sort of things are going to be difficult to prove.

The old legislation said - you can limit yourself to look for certain work so as long as you are available for that kind of work - having regard to your old occupation - previous occupation - but that does not apply when you have

got someone coming out of school who has not had time to establish themselves in an occupation. You do not have an occupation to refer back to.

Once they have surmounted all these hurdles, the amount that you get between 16 and 17 is £20.80 per week compared to £27.40 per week which you get if you are over 19 and to £34.90 per week which you get if you are 25 or over. This is another anomaly.

Also why should your rates go up? If you are at the over 25 rate you get £1.30, if you are at the under 25 rate you get £1 towards your rates quite how that differs with age I am not sure.

There is also a category of special hardship (now this is really quite extraordinary) it allows the Secretary of State or his representative to recognise a particular case or a particular category as leading to special hardship - it is entirely an administrative decision and the only way to get that reviewed - is through Judicial Review and to Divisional Court - so the chances of this exception being brought into play is minimal - especially when a youngster is on the street, trying to get a job or has run away from home. In a nutshell therefore, when there is special hardship that person, by virtue of at special hardship, cannot claim it - it seems to me that is a political proviso rather than an entirely practical one.

So you have got that situation and also on top of that individuals as usual are not allowed to claim benefit until the first Monday in September after they have actually left school so they have got that delay anyway. If you look at a situation where

Supposing young people are deciding that it is a bit of a nightmare on the job market here and they should get some further qualifications, again that is very difficult to do presently - if you are trying to do it on Income Support and trying to live away from home - there is something called the 21 hour rule - if contact you have with an Institution be it through classes, be it through experiments - be it through lectures or whatever - came to 21 hours a week or less then you could still continue to get your Income Support.

There is going to be a major gap between school and continuing with further education - you have got to wait for the first Monday in September and then spend at least 3 months on YTS before receiving benefit.

Then, of course, there is the question of students - we see a loan system is coming in now it is being proposed - it is very very difficult for those on lower incomes to get into the loan situation, apart from fear it could very well not result in full employment afterwards, and I know I

came from a middle class background - so paying off a loan is going to be problematic plus in the past students have been entitled to Housing Benefit - it is means tested - it varies you get less according to what you have coming in. Why the same rule can't apply right across the board based on someone's income - you know a student grant is still income - less for some people, more for some people - why not assess it on the same basis - one single exception in April will be that there is no housing benefit if you are a student - full stop - and that has been taken out - another example of what can be termed pure discrimination in the benefit system.

What about someone who is trying to get work - what is the situation for them for employment. The fact is you have to be employed at the moment for 2 years in order to qualify for Employment Protection Rights. Before that time you can be chucked out - unfair dismissal does not apply. Even that relatively minor protection, that of an Union, is denied to the young until they have got 2 years experience, 2 years in employment and that includes Maternity Rights which is extremely important for those who are actually trying to set themselves up after the pregnancy after having a child - as a young person. Single parents themselves are another category. So you have got discrimination in the employment market, you have got discrimination in entering the employment market - you have got discrimination in entering education as an alternative and a further source of discrimination is housing, where it would be extremely difficult for younger people - generally relying on the rented sector - to get into accommodation and equally it is going to be difficult for those who in the past have used hostels as a first step of moving away from home to continue to maintain themselves.

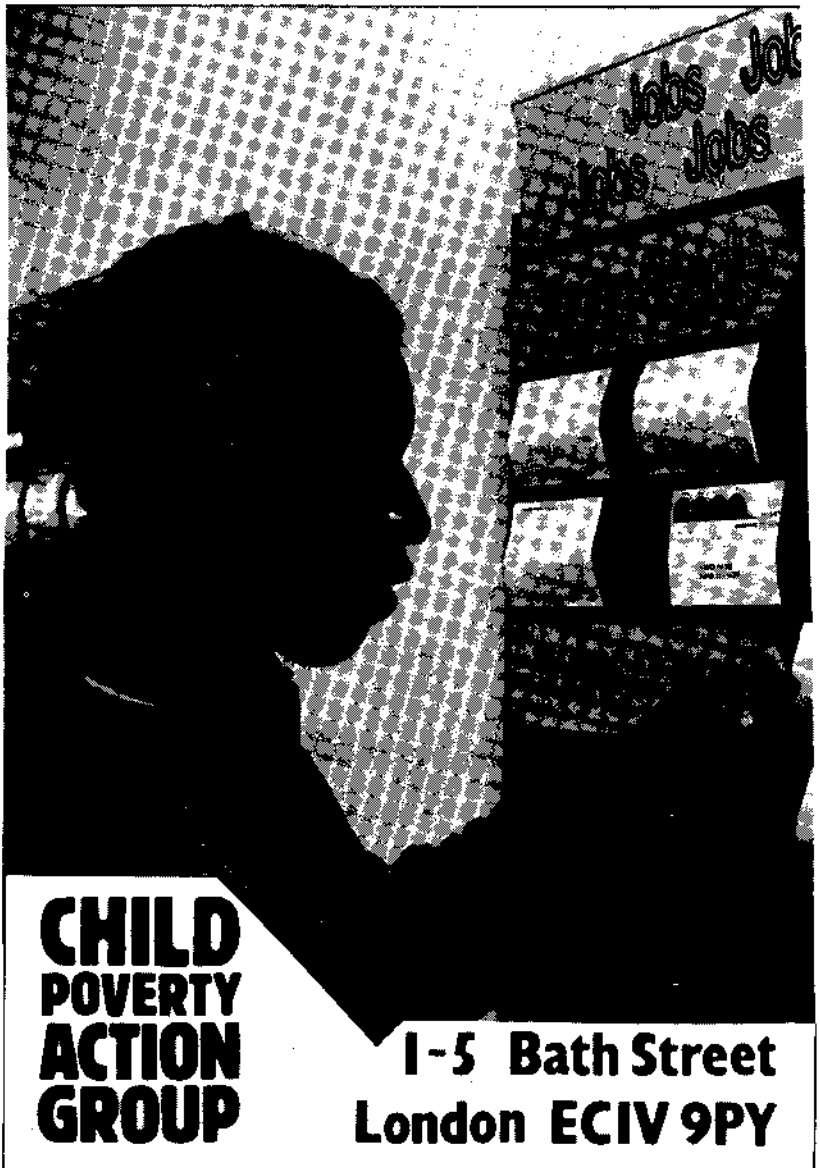
Housing law comes in - at the moment we have seen a deregulation of the private rented sector - and the Housing Act 1988 - basically landlords can get away with a great deal more - there is very little protection given - there is very little right written in by Statute in an individual contract - it is all open to negotiation and basically what that means in the market place today is imposition of the rights of the person who actually has the property. There is no room for argument. There is also much more limited tenure these days, the new assured shorthold tenancies which most landlords are now using mean basically they can chuck you out after 6 months.

It is being used in a very exploitative way in London at the moment due to the problems with mortgages - they put people in so as to continue to get some income out of a property until the property is saleable once again. There is very little security of tenure or rights in that situation and there are people who will

specifically buy up properties, harrass people out of them and sell them because they have got them at cheap cheap price to begin with and young people are particularly at risk from that. Also you have got situations where people in the past used to be able to book into a bed and breakfast or any other form of hostel and often when that hostel charged the price, you could get out of it a meal cost - alternatively where there were no cooking facilities none whatsoever - then an amount would be included towards the cost of these meals because they were going to be more pricey than if you had your own place and you can buy your own stuff and cook your own so an amount would be included in the Income Support - there was a special rate for borders - now that has gone as of the 1st October this year. So now these people live on income support, they have their housing benefits paying for the accommodation only and the amount that they have to pay for their meals is not covered at all.

Now of course we have the poll tax which is part housing and part individual. This is going to cause problems for multioccupancy houses and large families with teenagers over the age of 18, their bills will go up considerably.

So you can be in a catch 22 situation, as a teenager, where you cannot stay at home because it costs too much and causes friction and when you move and look for cheap accomodation, you still have to pay your poll tax entirely instaed of just a share of the rates bill as before. Only the homeless are exempt, so get out of your home, you cannot be traced, get off your electoral register but also you have to get your name off all local directories, even the local library and swimming pool records which can be used to trace you for poll tax. So this is causing the emergence of an underclass, who have nothing to thank the state for and who are alienating themselves more and more from the state. They are now being hit once again and retreating further from joining in society. They are becoming disenfranchised and rootless, an underclass devoid of the values of the local authorities and devoid of ties with the local community. These people are thus less able to contribute to society and thus to plan and help build a society in which they can participate. We thus have real poverty in this country, young people starving and homeless, drifting. The homeless who have no address cannot claim benefits, cannot get help and once they have an address, they will be slammed for poll tax. At the moment it is really rather frightening for a young person who is thinking of leaving home.



**CHILD
POVERTY
ACTION
GROUP**

**1-5 Bath Street
London EC1V 9PY**

"Childhood to motherhood - Where is adolescence for a girl from a developing country?"
Malika Ladjali - International Planned Parenthood Federation.

I am just a woman from a developing country. I love the way you talk about discrimination, but I am going to discriminate and I am going to talk about female adolescents who from the very beginning have had no voice, no right to speak, so I am going to give them a voice tonight, and I am going, for the moment to forget about the men.

Let us look at some facts; from the world fertility survey in the third world it was shown that deaths between the ages of one and five are much higher for girls than for boys; in Bangladesh 4 out of 5 teenage girls are mothers; in Africa 3 out of 4 and in south America the level of pregnancy in 17 year olds is 39%. These are facts worth discussing.

Now I will talk about a World that I am more familiar with, the world that I am part of, that is the Arab and Muslim world. Now in the Muslim world, there is NO ADOLESCENCE - especially for a female. Now as soon as she starts her periods, she becomes a danger for the family and that is because she has something called virginity or hymen. In the Muslim world and in Arab society, the girls body does not belong to her; it belongs first of all to Dady and then to her brothers, and the problem is that this body is seen as a danger to the family, she is like an unexploded bomb in the middle of the household. And after that she will belong to her husband.

We are in 1989 I would like to remind you of that because you may believe that I am speaking about the last century, but no, in 1989 a girl in a Arab country, when she gets married, needs a certificate of virginity. It is a must. I will tell you some stories. In Algeria they used to go to doctors and ask for a certificate of virginity and girls being girls, they often were worried about whether they still had their virginity, so they would send their younger sisters. Now however the system has changed and all certificates of virginity have to have the photograph of the girl on the certificate and the doctor must stamp the picture!

I would like to follow the theme of tonight by saying a few words about adoption. In Arab countries there is no such thing as adoption. The only exception is in Tunisia. However, although there is no adoption, there are children born out of wedlock. First of all they are not recognised, they are not citizens, their existence is not recognised at all. So what does an adolescent do when she is pregnant.

Sometimes it is incest, sometimes rape, sometimes she does not know she is pregnant. Sometimes the girl comes to a doctor and says could she be delivered by caesarean so that it will not show that she has had a baby.

There are only two things which she can do, either kill her child when he is born, or try to cope with the complicity of the mother - because they usually find a woman to help them and it is often the mother - the mother will scream and cry at first, but then she will help, it is the only thing she can do, only a woman can help this adolescent girl. The teenager will go to the hospital and will deliver the child and then? Sometimes the mother will pretend the baby is hers but often this is not the case.

So what can happen to this baby? It may seem radical to say so - but the best thing that can happen to that child is death! How do we know what happens to these children anyway? They officially do not exist so there are no statistics. There is no adoption, some children could be placed in families but then you cannot give them your name! So they cannot be taken home and raised with these families, they are always different. So often the children are abandoned. We have a 500 per 1,000 death rate for these children one in two will die! and the other ones have many problems.

So this is a sad picture. I wonder about sex education. Today I reviewed a very valuable film on AIDS prevention for teenagers and I thought, how would this film ever be seen in Algeria or in Iran - it really is just a dream - not even the year 2,000! Adolescents I know would love to be able to live like others - North Africa is only two hours from France, only two hours from Italy and the tourists come in and they see the difference. But I am not totally pessimistic, so my conclusion will be through three optimistic stories. We have people who will take a child, mainly sterile couples (of course in sterile couples it is always the woman's fault and a man may divorce and remarry two or three times to get a child but it is never the man's fault! - what I think is encouraging is that the sterile couples who will adopt a child, that is raise the child but not give it a name, they will adopt more daughters than sons. So sometimes girls are wanted.

In the summer I was in East Malaysia in the jungle, starting a nutrition programme and we went to the villages at night to speak to them. We asked them to choose women leaders so that we could discuss the programme with them. The men chose old women, non sexual and not a threat - this was a muslim city - but the women all chose adolescent girls, because they had been to school for one two or three years. I thought that was very important that women chose their daughters to be leaders - very optimistic.

Discussion

Diana Birch:- There are some points which I would like to take up on the poverty aspect. One of the articles in the newspapers this week which you probably all saw was the article in the Star about "Sharon - homeless pregnant and begs for food" - says a lot that article really - says a lot too about journalism. This sort of thing comes up every so often and whenever this happens we get in touch with them and say "Well, Ok, you're worried about this are you, Well how about helping, how about having an appeal, how about giving us some money?" and the answer is always a resounding NO! even when it's one of our girls who is in the picture. So they said no too.

One of the points that Nona Dawson from Bristol was wanting to make related to something we have been discussing for sometime. One of the pieces from the CPAG report which we published in the journal related to teenage mothers and benefits. Welfare benefits for mothers under the age of 18 are considerably less than those for mothers over the age of 18 although they actually need more money in my opinion. And of course if you are under 16 you get nothing - This is what Nona wanted to bring up - " The position of the schoolgirl mother, who after leaving full time education wishes to take part in a YTS, she will be in receipt of income support for herself and her child but will receive no financial assistance towards child care during training. In cost analysis of the situation, the state will lose out because these young women will remain for a longer period on state aid being unable to get jobs"

In fact this is something which came up over and over again in our survey of schoolgirl mothers, that while they are pregnant you get them one to one tuition, home tuition or whatever and they get interested in doing something again and then afterwards they cannot go to college and cannot get a job because they cannot get day care and have not got the money to pay for day care.

Andrew Knops; - It has been a real problem because it also ties in with availability for work - if you cannot accept work without day care then you are not technically available for work and can lose benefits. There is also no legal obligation on local authorities to provide services and day care. The poll tax may make a difference because services are likely to be cut to cover costs. There is no state provision, child care is dependant on local authorities.

Diana Birch;- Hedi, I think that when you were talking about the little child playing on the floor and looking for mother I was thinking that

pregnant

PAGE 3 STOCKING TOPPERS

SEX-MAL SINATRA

Read Sharon's moving story

Britain's homeless kids 5,000

LOVERS

d begs for food

● **DESPERATE** and alone, a runaway girl begs in London's crime-infested L... ground. Tragic Sharon B... is just 14 years old. She... of 100,000 kids who hee... the bright lights every yel... then fall prey to an evil army of pimps and perverts.

Six times before sh

DOUBLE MESSAGES?

These articles appeared on consecutive pages of a national newspaper - page three sexual titillation and oversexed stars - pregnant 14 year old begging in the street - what are we saying to the young? - Perhaps that it would be better for a young girl to strip for one of the newspapers or go to bed with 5,000 men rather than to make the mistake of looking for love in the arms of her boyfriend and falling pregnant. I wonder where the "pimps and perverts come in?"

what helped me to understand about young people needing to separate was when I heard John Bowlby talking about his theories of attachment he was saying that an infant needs to be able to explore the world from a secure base and that an adolescent needs to be able to do exactly the same they can go out and stay out late and so on knowing that they have a secure base back at home

Hedi Argent;-and it is very difficult for them to do it if they have had no experience of doing it as a child -

DB;- precisely, which is why they have to learn do it again through the process you were describing.

Robert Birch;- What I would like to ask about is the other side of the question, What makes people want to adopt an adolescent?

Hedi Argent;- Several things, some people like being parents most, they are not doctors, or psychologists etc and maybe they have not had much satisfaction out of the rest of their lives but they have been very good parents, and I have known families where the husbands have retired early in order to adopt difficult children because that is where their satisfaction lies. They have had their ordinary family with ordinary kids and now they can take on something more difficult. There are some who feel that they need to do something to say thank you, but as long as heir needs meet the child's need, I don't think it matters what their motivation is.

RB;- But you have an age limit do you?

Hedi Argent;- No. One of our most succesful cases was after an open meeting when an old lady was seen crying in the corner and she said that she loved children so much but nobody would ever place one with her, because she was 60. So I said if you take a child of 15 or 16 who won't live long and she adopted a 14 year old boy with cystic fibrosis who had a two year life expectancy - he lived to 25 but she still outlived him.

DB;- Malika, when you speak of the young girl going to hospital to have her baby and being dependant on the help of a woman, often her mother as the only person she can rely on; how often does it happen that they pretend that the baby belongs to her mother, and that the child goes back into the family?

Malika Ladjali;- This is very interesting because when the country produced a national census, from time to time we have a woman of 84 having perhaps a baby four years old and insisting that this is

my baby. Usually though they may go and have the baby somewhere far away and forget about it, come back without the baby. But things are improving - ten years ago infanticide was very common and 90% of women in jails were there for infanticide. It is changing, a little bit because of abortion but it is very difficult because the Koran is very clear on this. One of the reasons against adoption is that if you adopt and give a child your name, you will never know if that child may unknowing then meet a relative and fall in love and then that would be incest. The problem is that a woman might come or an abortion and may be seven months pregnant - so what can you do?

Sonia McCarthy;- Andrew, I understood that the 21 hour rule was discretionary is that so?

Andrew Knops;- No it is statutory. You have to be attending a course analogous to a YTS or a course of advanced education at a college or school. Then you have to be willing to give that up if a vacancy comes up.

Audience;- Andrew, you describe the homeless drifting youth - with a cold winter coming on do you foresee that we will have the situation of young homeless literally dying on the streets?

Andrew Knops;-There are people on the streets not being looked after, without benefits, there are squats but how many people like this young girl begging on the street have actually had their baby on the street - maybe they have not got in touch with home, or help either partly they do not want to go outside the few contacts they have made, they are not rushing into hostels, but there are not the hostels there to hold them - so yes that is a possibility.

DB;- Well we have to remember that it is not only in Africa that people are having babies on the street, a couple of times a year here we see headlines, baby found dead in park, new born baby found and that sort of thing so it would seem that whatever the needs of young people are - we are not meeting them.

Andrew Knops;- One thing which I think is important is that a group such as your's should keep abreast of the legal changes, you are an important contact point for the young and it is through you that they can find out about their rights. Also you can collect case studies, statistics. These cases can get lost, be ignored, we need to note them and put forward the difficulties - the government are not highlighting them but we have to put them forward so that the government do not get away with these things.

LowDown - This new project has been started in Northampton by Paul Griffiths (who spoke at our RSM meeting in 1987). Paul was the initiator of Childline and is now training officer with the NSPCC. We hope that Youth Support House and LowDown will be cooperating in a joint venture in providing 'safe' counselling to abused teenagers.

THE LOWDOWN

for young people

PHONE

MoN To
FRi ~
4~7PM
SaT ~
10am ~
7PM

IF YOU EVER
NEED SOMEBODY
TO TALK TO,
YOU'LL FIND WE
SPEAK THE
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ask us to.

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 - advice
 - counselling
 - phone
 - walk in

for young people

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OR
Visit



LOWDOWN is open to all young people, regardless of race, religion, disability or personal circumstances.

Anniversaries - It seems that a lot of our organisations are having 25th birthday celebrations - in the last issue we congratulated the Brook on 25 years and 1990 will be the 25th anniversary of the founding of CPAG (Child Poverty action Group). But after 25 years how far have we progressed?. The Brook's pioneering work has certainly provided services for teenagers which could never have been envisaged a generation ago. I certainly remember when I was at medical school that Family planning was carried out practically in secret, with women coming in through the side door of the clinic and having to declare that they were married before they were given contraception - we have come a very long way if we look at that - after all how many types of condoms can a young person buy now? I recently went to Boots to buy a few samples for a talk I was giving and the assistant told me to make sure I got all the coloured and ribbed ones or the children would think I didn't know as much as they did. -"You have to pretend you're one step ahead you know!" However, despite this progress on one side, on the other hand we have constant threats to women's rights and to the freedom to plan pregnancies in the constant challenges to the abortion act and attacks on sex education.

The underclasses Andrew Knops in his talk at the Royal Society meeting highlighted the problems of a poor youth society who are increasingly alienated and distanced from society by the poverty trap that they find themselves in. Charles Murray, a political scientist (a bit of a non sequitor I think!) wrote an article in the Sunday Times magazine of 26th November titled "Underclass". He postulates that "The alienated poor are devastating America's cities - is the same happening here?". He defines underclass "not only by it's poverty, but by a refusal to integrate with mainstream society". According to Murray this underclass can be identified by three early warning signals; illegitimacy, violent crime and drop- out from the labour force. I quote "Britain has a growing population of working aged, healthy people who live in a different world from other Britons, who are raising their children to live in it and whose values are contaminating the life of entire neighbourhoods..."

In the light of what we have heard from Andrew Knops about teenage poverty and what we already know about the poverty trap and the cycle of poverty which young mothers can find themselves trapped in (I refer you to "Schoolgirl pregnancy- a culture of poverty" in issue 2.2), I find Murray's comments facetious and elitist. What also angers me is the way he is actually quoting information about families on the North Peckham estate, families who I have worked with, an estate

Have it on before you have it off



CONDOMS CAN PREVENT
AIDS
Cervical Cancer
Chlamydia
Gonorrhoea
Syphilis
Other STDs
& PREGNANCY

*available from NAC 4 Wild Court WC2

that I have visited day and night for the best part of ten years - to dismiss them all as an underclass would seem to me to be a gross disservice. The danger is that when pseudo scientific and plausible, but flawed 'intellectual evidence' is put forward in this way, there will be some, perhaps in high places, who will fasten upon such arguments to condemn rather than help. Such theories, after all, dispel all possible guilt which the 'haves' may feel regarding the 'have nots'. Deserving poor in your own back yard are a threat - an undeserving underclass can legitimately be stamped on.

MAKING DO AMONG THE UNDERCLASS

Computer-assisted detection and intervention in adolescent high-risk health behaviors

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Because adolescents avoid bringing sensitive issues, such as substance abuse, suicide, and sexual activity, to pediatricians, and may fail to realize that they need health education or services, a computer program was designed to facilitate reporting of high-risk psychosocial and health behaviors and to provide specific health advice and referral for timely professional intervention. Computer printouts done anonymously by a random sample of 265 adolescents after a physical examination were compared with those of a matched group of 294 who were predicted to share the printout with the clinician at their examinations. The former elicited more positive responses to sensitive health problems, but both computer groups responded significantly more often about most high-risk issues than a matched written questionnaire group of 251. Almost all adolescents said that they reported true information to the computer and read all the information if printed. Experience with 3327 teenagers demonstrated that 89% preferred the computer over a questionnaire or personal interview, but nearly all were willing to share the printout with the pediatrician, which should facilitate clinical evaluation. The nonjudgmental computer can identify problem areas and deliver automated medical advice and referral. Automated health assessment and education may become a useful adjunct for addressing adolescent health issues. (J PEDIAT 1989;115:xxx-xxx)

Teen Health Computer Programmes Yes, we finally have the teen health computer programmes for health education. At the moment we are in the process of customising them for Youth Support. One of the programmes was demonstrated at the RSM meeting, thank you to Anthea page for being our 'teenager' for the night! Getting the programmes proved hazardous - they were ordered in good time but had failed to arrive only a few days before the meeting. Harrassed telephone calls were made to Hawaii to have them dispatched by couriers - who were closed in London, it being midnight, and would be closed in Honolulu when they opened in London, there being a 12 hour time difference! DHL refused to send little red lines searing round the globe as in the TV advert - a blatant misrepresentation. We were advised to get federal express couriers - panic had struck in by now as the receptionist answered the phone at 1am - PLEASE will you help us, we must get some computer programmes from Hawaii in 24 hours! "Sorry, dear, could be a bit difficult - you see we're a minicab company!" With visions of London Taxis struggling to Hawaii University with steam hissing from their overheated engines, we were given the number of Federal Express International - "We get a lot of calls for them dear" - "Oh yes, we can get the discs here for you in 24 hours, but it will take us two days to get started!" - Eventually an idea dawned, as daylight did also, we used our computers! The programmes were sent by modem!

..... HAPPY CHRISTMAS!!