Child Abuse—No Way!

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The Youth and the Law Project is designed to give young people a chance to do something about a topic that concerns them directly or indirectly. I was fortunate enough to be one of four people who worked on a group project concerning a very serious problem with our society. Child abuse nowadays is not a rare phenomenon. It is a cleverly disguised problem which the public is more often than not quite unwilling to discuss. Essentially, most people prefer not to involve themselves with other people’s problems. However, an apathetic attitude such as this can mean the difference between a happy child and one who is physically and mentally injured and scarred. It could mean the difference between life and death. Until the Community Youth Forum in 1986, I had no idea of the magnitude of the problem nor how little information was available to the public.

What evolved from the Forum was a group willing to further the need to strike an awareness amongst everyone, children and adults, in recognising any form of child abuse and being responsible enough to do something about it. The group was called ‘Kids Caring for Kids’. The group decided to create a kit, a booklet containing learning activities and discussion questions on physical, emotional and sexual abuse, which would inform and help others through what is learned. It sounded like a great idea.

Information was collected by writing to people and checking definitions. It took two years of ‘brainstorming ideas’ to come up with a kit which could be effectively run in groups of five to ten people facilitated by an experienced person with some training in the area of child abuse.

The product of our efforts was the kit ‘Child Abuse—No Way!’ Covering the three types of abuse: physical, emotional and sexual abuse, the kit ideally should not be seen as therapy, but rather as a training module in encouraging awareness.

Each section contains:

- an information cover page;
- a fictional story and discussion questions;
- a skill developing activity; and
- a definition and various newspaper clippings.

For legal reasons, real stories and photographs could not be used, but the fictional stories are based on reported cases.

The kit also contains information on:
- how to notify an authority if one knows or suspects a case of child abuse;
• how to support a victim;
• indicators of abuse;
• the vital difference between good and bad touching;
• an extensive contact list of places and people who can help;
• how to run the kit itself; and
• suggestions on what you can do to help.

The kit encourages people to become actively involved in stopping abuse. It develops group participation allowing a variety of opinions and ideas to be discussed with every contribution being acknowledged. The kit acts as a channel for the discussion of child abuse amongst young people which in the past has been an unapproachable topic. Previously, this issue was only discussed in adult circles.

Although distributed to schools, youth groups and community welfare agencies throughout New South Wales, and interstate, information contained in the kit should not be reserved for young people—it should be known by everyone. The kit was launched by the Hon. Virginia Chadwick, Minister for Family and Community Services on 16 June 1988.

We did not claim to be experts. We learnt that parents too, have many problems and can be easily provoked by the innocence of children. However, there is a fine line between abuse and corrective handling. No child should be subjected to any form of abuse. There are people available to talk to and places to stay if things should get a little rough at home. 'Child Abuse?—No Way!': that is what it is all about.