

Editorial: Advocating for Care

It has been a difficult year. A year in which optimism about a peace dividend was lost and conditions for children became worse. Millions are homeless, addicted, abused and growing up without human connections. They are having babies and joining gangs and cults at unprecedented rates. In our urban centers, less than half the students are graduating from high school. Triage has become a common term in departments of human services.

In order to overcome the crisis, we will have to help find creative alternatives for rearing children and helping families. It's an enormous challenge for all human service professionals. Fortunately, however, after thirty years of professional development, we are more prepared than ever before to help. We have developed educational programs, set standards, and created a knowledge base that is rich with ideas and solutions. For example, in a recent book, *Reclaiming Youth at Risk*, Larry Brendtro, Martin Brokenleg, and Steve Van Bockern, write: "In traditional Native society, it was the duty of all adults to serve as teachers of younger persons. Child rearing was not just the province of biological parents but children were nurtured in a large circle of significant others." From their research of Native Cultures they propose a Circle of Courage in which the right to belong, generosity, independence, and mastery become primary child rearing values. Imagine if every child in North America could belong to something worthwhile, learn how to master job skills, value generosity, and have the opportunity to be independent. Henry Maier, one of our most prominent educators, has written extensively on developmental care. Imagine if his teachings were integrated into the life of every child.

Our efforts won't do any good, of course, unless we can convince others it is important. In 1990, FICE (loosely translated as the Federation of International Communities for Education), an organization with members from several European countries, held its international child and youth care conference in Prague, Czechoslovakia, a country whose people had just used words to drive out an unwanted government. The strategy of their leader, Vaclav Havel, and others, in very simple terms, was to form coalitions and hammer away at one or two issues that the majority could agree upon, such as freedom of speech, until the government could no longer get away with oppression or ignore the will of the people. Perhaps the most powerful symbol of their nonviolent revolution is a graffiti-covered Russian tank,

which is turned on its side in Wenceslas Square.

The organizational challenge for us is similar. While encouraging creativity and autonomy among individuals and local associations, we also have to find a few common issues that can bring everyone together. For example, what if we all demanded that each child had a right to care the way it has been defined by Brendtro, Maier and others and insisted upon competent (educated and certified) caregivers. What if teachers, social workers, and child and youth care workers across the continuum of services—from family preservation to residential treatment; from early childhood to adolescence—took the same stance. Perhaps we too could gain public support and remove politicians who think that tanks are more important than children.

M.K.