

Suffer the children.

Published in the Kitchener Waterloo Record, March 21, 1998

Isaac Prilleltensky

We all know that prevention is better than cure, but provincial ministries of health devote less than 1% of their budgets to prevention of mental health problems. Most of the money goes toward treatment. We want teenagers unprepared for parenthood to stop having children, but we are unwilling to invest in family planning, educational and preventive services. The result: Teenage pregnancy in Canada has sharply risen in recent years, an increase from 39,340 in 1987 to 45,771 in 1995.

We know that about 26% of Canadian children experience behavioural, learning, emotional or social problems, but nobody seems to panic. We understand that brain malleability is greatest during the first years of life, but we spend most of our economic and social resources on adults and seniors. We have social funds for unemployed people and pension plans for the retired, but there is no comparable fund for disadvantaged children.

We hear the economy is doing very well, but the number of children at risk goes up all the time. While provincial and federal budgets are being balanced, children continue to suffer, perhaps more than before. A child is reported missing in Canada about every 9 minutes, for a total of more than 56,000 cases a year. Many of these children leave their homes to escape abuse. Close to a million and a half, or 21% of Canada's children live in poverty, half a million more than in 1989, when the entire House of Commons voted to end child poverty by the year 2000.

We want communities to contribute to the well-being of children and youth, but instead of supporting formal and informal services we cut their funding. Recently, the National Forum on Health, the Standing Committee on Health of the House of Commons, Health Canada, the National Crime Prevention Council, and the Canadian Association of Public Health, to name but a few, affirmed the importance of strong communities for children's health. These claims are at odds with prevailing policies of social disinvestment.

We are proud of the international reputation of Canada in promoting children's rights, but the country has higher rates of child poverty than most industrialized nations. In a report entitled Towards Well-Being, the Standing Committee on Health of the House of Commons stated that Apoverity among children in Canada is especially troublesome when compared with the rate in other industrialized countries. The rate of child poverty in Canada after government redistribution is four times the rate in Sweden, twice as high as in France and Germany, and 1.4 times the rate in Great Britain. Only in the United States is the rate higher than in Canada. @

We require a license to fish, but have no standards to ensure that parents know how to treat their children. We watch ads to prevent cruelty against animals and trees, but see no such thing to stop child abuse.

So what, you might say, life is full of contradictions, and besides, Awe=re not perfect. @ True, we=re not perfect, but unless like Rip Van Winkle, we=ve been peacefully sleeping for the past 20 years, we must be disturbed by these contradictions.

Child abuse happens every day, in every community. Yet public concern is only sporadic, elicited mainly by reports of brutal assaults against children. Child maltreatment, however, is not just about brutality; it is also about subtle but protracted and piercing pain, about feeling lonely, abandoned, betrayed, rejected and unworthy. Daily humiliation, however, is not newsworthy. Children's silent anguish is not flashy enough for the nightly news. Albeit poignant reports on the subject have been published and hotly debated, they have been only temporarily considered and permanently shelved. Lack of sustained attention to child abuse and neglect notwithstanding, the problem persists, and it is close to all of us.

Maltreatment is about trust betrayed, love warped, and opportunities lost; it is about stealing happiness and depriving joy; it is about exploiting power and denigrating others. Abuse is about a vicious cycle that affects victims, their offsprings, and society at large. While some children develop resiliency and overcome abusive backgrounds to become loving, caring, and productive citizens, many others succumb under the weight of the trauma and develop psychological problems. Crime and delinquency, which cost Canadians approximately \$46 billion annually, have been linked to histories of abuse. The enormous price of punitive and rehabilitative services drains our social wealth to the point that little is left for preventing abuse from occurring in the first place.

The answer: Address the root causes of the problem and interrupt the vicious cycle. The barrier: Cynicism about governments= and communities= abilities to stop abuse. The evidence: Many emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and social problems, including child maltreatment, can be significantly prevented. Research shows that some prevention programs are effective and save governments up to 7 dollars for each dollar invested.

Unless we are determined to eradicate child abuse, we can expect the cost of remedial and therapeutic services associated with it to go up endlessly. The more abuse there is, the stronger the call for reactive services, and fewer the dollars for proactive interventions. It is only by a massive investment in prevention that we can reasonably expect less suffering. Such an investment, while costly at first, will more than pay for itself in dollars saved for remedial services in special education, welfare, health, and the criminal justice system. In human terms, the savings simply defy calculation.

Ironically, our major problem is not the abuse itself, for it is tragic but largely preventable. Our gravest problem is the lack of social concern and political will. Our collective task is to resurrect public concern, infuse political will, and pressure governments to replicate programs that have proven successful in preventing child abuse. The measure of our success will be how much longer we have to wait until we stop child abuse.

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Whose Society, Whose Best Interest?

Published in Canada's weekly magazine Maclean's December 30, 1996, p. 9

(Pre-publication draft. Published version is shorter than this one)

Isaac Prilleltensky

If there was a test about what constitutes the public good, most of us would fail miserably, including those of us with university degrees. Lack of numerical and verbal literacy is bad enough, but there is another type of ignorance that has similar or even greater negative consequences: Moral and political illiteracy. This is the type of ignorance that results from not knowing how to challenge dominant ideas about what our society should be like. We learn more and more about how to control nature but fall short of resolving basic human predicaments. This is not because social problems are insolvable, but because there are powerful groups interested in keeping things the way they are.

Some of our social problems would be solved by having a more progressive tax system and by having corporations pay their euphemistically called "deferred" taxes. But instead of discussing how to make corporations accountable, our attention is diverted by talk about too much government and too many welfare recipients.

The problem is that rhetoric and propaganda do work. The corporate world sets the agenda, the media disseminates it, the government executes it, and the public believes it. We lack the political education necessary to see how different interests affect public life. We are under the impression that economic and social policies are set by historical circumstances beyond people's control, when in fact there are very real people setting policies and benefitting from them.

According to Donaldo Macedo, author of *Literacies of Power*, schools and the media play a big role in perpetuating political ignorance. They reproduce cultural values that distort and falsify realities so as to benefit the interest of the power elite. @ Our culture fails to see the perils of political ignorance. We acquiesce to dominant discourses about deficit reductions and excessive public expenditures. We accept the implicit authority of the media and corporate spokespersons unquestioningly. The immediate price of our credulity: increased human suffering for those who rely on public support.

Lack of opposition to unjust policies allows the gap between rich and poor to widen. Policies that foster unemployment result in more children living in poverty. A 1% increase in the rate of unemployment increases the child poverty rate by 1%. This results in about 70,000 more children growing up in disadvantaged conditions. According to Statistics Canada, 20% of children in this country grow up in poverty. The recently released National Longitudinal Study on Children and Youth indicates that close to 40% of children growing up in very poor families experienced emotional or behavioural disorders, repeated a grade, or had impaired social relationships. Since the federal government announced in 1989 its plan to eradicate child poverty by the year 2000, child poverty increased 46%. These numbers should shock us, but they

don't. We are not only politically illiterate but also emotionally numb. Stories of child poverty rarely receive as much sustained attention as monarchy gossip.

There is really no mystery behind the manipulation of the public agenda by the rich. They have their own interests to protect and they use whatever means they have at their disposal to promote them. The Business Council on National Issues, the most powerful lobby group in Canada, does an enviable job of influencing governments to promote the agenda of big business. Few people in Canada know that this group represents the most powerful industries and that it operates as a shadow cabinet.

No need to invoke conspiracy theories. Lobbying is an integral part of the political process in Canada, and they take full advantage of it. The problem is that alternative perspectives on the public good receive limited coverage. Hence, the public agenda is dominated by talk about wasteful social programs and inadequate poor people. In Ontario, welfare recipients are repeatedly subjected to humiliating descriptions in letters to the Editor. These feelings are fuelled by politicians who depict the poor as unmotivated and undeserving of public help. These portrayals are handmaidens to corporate Canada. Focus on inadequate individuals diverts attention from corporations delinquent on taxes.

Such is the control corporations exercise over public discourse that any attempt to challenge deficit reductions is ridiculed as blasphemous. Eminent scholars such as John Kenneth Galbraith in *The Good Society*, John Ralston Saul in *The Unconscious Civilization*, and David Korten in *When Corporations Rule the World* challenge the received corporate wisdom about deficit reductions and comment on the difficulties they have getting their message across.

Why is it that we acquiesce to the dogmatic tune of big business and fail to come up with compelling alternatives? It is because we have internalized a system of values and beliefs supportive of the established social order and the classes that control it. These values become part of our "common sense." This common sense is achieved by defining problems in such a way that their solutions do not threaten the status quo. The dominant ideology defines social problems in terms of personal deficits. Thus, poverty is explained by individual deficits such as low intelligence or laziness. In fact, not personal but systemic changes such as a modest increase in corporate taxation would eliminate child poverty in Canada. If corporations in Canada were contributing at the G-7 average, they would provide additional revenue in the amount of \$20 billion each year. According to Campaign 2000's *Crossroads for Canada: A Time to Invest in Children and Families*, this amount would be enough to eradicate child poverty in the entire country. Among 12 industrialized nations, Canada is the lowest in its economic support for poor children and families. The political will of less wealthy but more generous countries ensures that poor families receive sufficient support.

Next time we read about social issues or hear politicians or lobbyists talk about what is good for society, we would do well to ask *whose* interests they represent and *whose* society are they talking about. Are they talking on behalf of those who benefit from tax cuts or on behalf of children who suffer because of tax cuts? The public can understand the language of interests and power. The current romance with economic lingo should be replaced by clear language that exposes who benefits and who suffers from social and economic policies.

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Children=s Rights: Who Cares?

Published as Suffer the Children in Kitchener Waterloo Record, January 10, 1998

Published version is slightly longer than this one.

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Austria, 1940s, doctors kill children with disabilities to examine their brains. Brazil, 1980s, off-duty police execute street children because they are considered a public nuisance. United States, 1990, the US Advisory Board on Child

Abuse and Neglect declares society's lack of response to the crisis of child abuse a national moral disaster. Canada, 1997, the number of children living in poverty reaches a million and a half. Ontario, 1997, child protection services can't cope with the increased number of families requiring help due to cuts in social programmes. Children's rights are violated everywhere because children have no vote and no power. No vote, no voice; no voice, no power; no power, no rights.

Children, no doubt the most vulnerable members of society, have no social movement to advance their cause. Unlike other groups claiming their legitimate rights, such as seniors, labour, women, and ethnic minorities, children are political orphans. Until adults embrace their plight seriously, children will continue to suffer from blatant as well as subtle forms of abuse. This brings us to the question of caring.

Most adults would take offence at the thought that they don't care about children. Most of us regard ourselves as caring and compassionate people. But a second look at our caring practices suggests that being nice to a few kids is not good enough. Caring can be reactive and proactive, and caring can be shown towards those near to us and those far from us. I submit that most of us limit our caring to those children who are close to us. If and when we do care about children beyond our families, schools, and communities, we do so mostly in a reactive form; typically in response to a crisis or a dramatic event like a famine.

Acting compassionately toward our own children is not good enough. What about the needs of other children who suffer from hunger, abuse, exploitation, and shame? Helping victims of disease or poverty is not good enough either. We need to extend our compassion beyond our immediate circle of care, and we need to prevent poverty and illness, not just respond to them after the fact. If we think about children's rights in the narrow terms of caring only about our own youngsters' well-being, then perhaps a lot of us do care. But if we think about caring as looking after the unfortunate children of society in the present as well as in the future, then few of us really stand up to the challenge.

Let's consider the predicament of children whose rights are violated, who are abused by parents, and who go hungry because social policies neglect to take their needs seriously into account. If we truly care about their rights, and about the rights of children of future generations, then we need to invest effort, money, and ample resources to prevent these tragedies from occurring, in the present, and in the future. Adults invest in pension plans to avert poverty in old age. Employees pay unemployment insurance to guard against harsh economic times. Even the government contributes to these funds because it recognizes that citizens need protection. But this protection is afforded only to those who vote: adults and seniors. Children have no vote and no comparable social fund either.

It is easy for politicians to divert calls for increased resources for children because they can always point to the parents as the ones who should be looking after their children. Children's misfortune is conveniently ascribed to parental failure. This is despite an abundance of social science research, conveniently ignored by politicians, which points to the fact that a reduction in resources results in increased family stress and in violations of children's rights.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child stipulates that children's rights depend on our ability to provide them with protection, health care, opportunities for education and personal development, compassion, voice, autonomy, respect for their diverse backgrounds, and adequate resources. These are useful guidelines to promote the rights of the children we know and of those we don't know. Just like seniors deserve their pensions, and unemployed people deserve their benefits, so do children deserve social funds to ensure that the principles inscribed in the Convention are upheld. Improving children's lives requires a long term investment, a proactive strategy that provides families with child care and that eliminates child poverty, just like several European countries have done. Caring is more than showing empathy toward our children. Caring is fighting to ensure a decent future for all children.

Let's revisit then the meaning of caring. If caring involves a concern, not only for our own children but for others' as well, and if caring entails looking after children in the present as well as in the future, what are we doing that can be legitimately called caring? When was the last time that you, or I, became involved in social policies affecting children? What are we doing to prevent violations of children's rights? Several Canadian organizations are advocating the cause of children. Coalitions like Campaign 2000 and Voices for Children, as well as the Canadian Council on Social Development, strive to influence social policy so that governments and citizens don't just react to the needs of

disadvantaged children; their goal is to prevent disadvantage altogether, a caring goal indeed.

January 8, 1998

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Values in Disarray Harm Children

Isaac Prilleltensky

Published in Kitchener Waterloo Record, 1998

Public willing to support children

At a time when in Canada children suffer from social disinvestment, we should support universal structures that work for children and families. The argument that we are overtaxed and that we cannot afford more help to families needs to be challenged. Figures for 1996 released by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) show that Canada ranked below average (18th out of 29 OECD countries) in terms of the percentage of GDP collected as tax revenue. A 1998 survey conducted by the Canadian Policy Research Network found that 75% of people interviewed were willing to pay higher taxes if they knew their money would be spent on children. Let the federal and provincial governments listen to the people and prove their commitment to children by providing adequate funding to preventive and protective services.

Promoting strong community structures for children and families should be a guiding value for our society. Preserving and improving worthy institutions should be part of our vision for children. If child-tax benefits rescue families from falling below the poverty line, then we should maintain them. If children's services prevent abuse from occurring, then we should strengthen them. If innovative programs reduce the incidence of abuse and neglect, then we should implement them. But these initiatives require active support of community structures, for there are those invested in dismantling what we have.

Neo-conservative and neo-liberal thinkers alike insist on reducing the functions of the state in helping disadvantaged children and families. Publicly funded institutions perform a critical role in preventing negative chain reactions for people at risk. But the virtue of these agencies goes beyond supporting the needy, for they enhance the health and welfare of the population at large. Strong community services afford us clean water, sewage systems, child-care, recreational opportunities, libraries, unemployment insurance, pension plans, free primary and secondary education, access to health care, and many other social goods.

An appreciation for what community structures do should be part of our social values. A good society cannot flourish in the absence of supporting institutions. Personal and common aspirations thrive on material and spiritual grounds. Community structures afford tangible aid and a sense of community that are essential for nourishing the physical and the psychological. Without instruments of public help, those at risk slide further down toward despair. Several European countries, like Sweden, Denmark and Holland, have long understood the benefits of universality. Child poverty in these countries is no longer viewed as a problem. They respect collective values as much as personal values.

Values out of balance, out of context, and out of control

The main problem in our society is that collective values, such as social justice, support for public institutions and solidarity with the poor, are positioned at the background of our priorities. In our society values are out of balance, out of context, and out of control.

Values are out of balance because self-interest, with the tacit approval of bankers, politicians, and popular culture, takes primacy over all other values. Values are out of context because in the current historical moment people yearn for more solidarity and sense of community, but the media continue to produce images of personal elevation as the ultimate goal in life. Finally, values are out of control because individualism is rampant and nearly uncontrollable,

with greed and competition at an all time high in the West.

Three values for public policy

Liberty, equality, fraternity. Which of these values is the most important? Think about it for a minute. If you answered liberty, equality, or fraternity, your answer is wrong. Your answer is wrong because the question is wrong. These three values exist in inseparable form. Many of our social ills derive from according to one value superiority over the others. In our society, the supremacy of liberty over equality and fraternity is costing us dearly. Not because liberty is an unworthy value, but because liberty in the absence of equality and fraternity degenerates into selfishness and greed.

To fulfil our needs and obligations we require three sets of linked values. We require personal, collective, and relational values. Private dreams require public playgrounds. Personal health requires public hospitals. To play we need safe public spaces. To advance our education we need high quality universities. To look after our health we need well equipped hospitals. Personal and collective values go hand in hand.

But in order to avoid conflict between private and social interests we need a third set of values, we need relational values. Values such as collaboration, consultation, and respect for diversity are essential for peaceful co-existence. Otherwise, the interests of powerful groups will always prevail over the needs of less powerful citizens.

Here, in a nutshell, we have values to guide social policies. Our policies should promote the well-being of individual children and communities at the same time, and they should do so by collaborating with the public and by promoting a sense of solidarity. As a group, the values of liberty, equality, and fraternity look after personal and communal well-being at the same time. Neglecting equality and fraternity leads to the neglect of poor children we currently see. Despite this negative trend, there are local groups in Waterloo Region seeking to reinvest efforts and resources into children. Action for Children Coalition of Waterloo Region is such a group. If you wish to help to put children first, call co-chairs *Dr. Isaac Prilleltensky at 884-0710, ext. 3989, or Dr. Dave Rainham at 241-3496.*

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Beware of Dogmatism
Published as Why Politicians Have Problems with Promises
Toronto Star, March 2, 99

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Most social ills are too complex to be cured with single interventions, yet spin doctors love to treat social cancers with political aspirins. But politicians are not entirely to blame, for the public also loves the taste of simple solutions. In the last Ontario elections, tax cuts to the middle class was the dogmatic flavour of the month, and a lot of people loved it.

Beware though of politicians who offer simple solutions to complex problems, for quick fixes usually don't work. But there is an election coming up in Ontario and we can expect politicians to make all kinds of promises and to make us believe they have easy- to-follow instructions to solve our predicaments.

Politicians distinguish themselves in the way they explain and solve social problems. Some assign responsibility for the problem to individual people, others to government. Some assign responsibility for the solution to private citizens, others to the state. Dogmatism focuses on one cause for the problem, and one way to solve it. This either/or mentality simplifies to the extreme complex realities. Most social problems cannot be attributed to a single cause. An analysis of most social issues shows that both individuals and governments bear some responsibility for problems and solutions.

But party leaders and strategists love dogmatism and simple solutions. It's useful for them to put the blame for a problem squarely in one place: youth, welfare recipients, single mothers, unions, or government bureaucracy for that matter. During the last provincial elections welfare recipients were an easy target for the conservatives. You can expect

children to be this election=s target. Despite the fact that only very few youth get into trouble, it=s easy to incite people against all kids. Harris has already started his campaign against kids. What=s ironic is that some kids are getting into trouble because of the cuts in public services Harris himself introduced.

What we need is a balanced approach to social problems, one that balances the role of the individual with the role of government. But if balance between individual and collective responsibility is so important, how come we neglect it? The answer is complicated, but part of it lies in the fact that societies are not run on the basis of everyone=s needs, but mostly on the needs of those who run them. If those who run society benefit from explanations that blame the individual, we can expect a neglect of the role of government. Such is the case in Canada today, where corporations and the political elite benefit from less government.

Today, many personal and social problems are dogmatically defined in personal and psychological terms; the role of the state in creating and solving difficulties is undermined and minimized. Leaders are under pressure by corporations to slash public spending, and to avoid investments in the public sector the business agenda propagates a dogmatic Avictim-blaming@ mentality. This mentality assigns responsibility for the problem and the solution to individual people, Asuggesting that present inequalities are justified because if people really wanted to work hard and improve themselves they could do so. No systemic injustice explains their inequality; instead, those who do not get ahead have failed themselves.@ This is how Canadian sociologists Allahar and Côté describe the dominant mentality in their 1998 book *Richer and Poorer: The Structure of Inequality in Canada*. If all problems are personal problems, then there is no need for the state to intervene and to help.

AFix people not society@ is a good example of dogmatism; it leads us to believe that people are on welfare because they want to, that the homeless are on the street because they are lazy, and that children get into trouble because they are bad. For the most part, however, people are on welfare because of social conditions of unemployment; the homeless have no shelter because of lack of public housing; and children get into trouble because of a combination of psychological, family and social problems. But dogmatic and victim-blaming explanations are handy because they let those of us who are neither homeless nor poor off the hook. AIt=s their problem, it=s their fault; I feel sorry for them but there is nothing I can do and I should not pay higher taxes to help them.@ How many of us shirk collective responsibility this way?

To prevent dogmatism we need to pay equal attention to individual and social responsibility. On the one hand, strong government and public services are vital in supporting individuals; not just those at-risk, but everyone -- where would we be if we didn=t have universal health care? Would we be like the US, where nearly 40 million people lack any sort of health care? On the other hand, productive citizens are also essential for the running of private and public sectors. Without responsible citizens we would have the type of corrupt system that many countries have to put up with.

We need to create public institutions that facilitate personal development and encourage personal responsibility. However, government is not to replace personal initiative, a problem currently faced by some Nordic and communist countries. Individuals cannot be absolved of their personal responsibility to improve their lot in life, but nor can government relinquish its role in creating a positive social and economic climate.

Beware of solutions that sound too easy to be true. Next time public figures blame entire groups, like doctors, teachers, youth, government officials, unions, single mothers or immigrants for our predicaments, challenge their dogmatism. It will force them to seek a more balanced and sophisticated approach to problems.

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Children Forgotten in Election Campaign

Published in Kitchener Waterloo Record as Suffer the Children, February 10, 1999

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Not surprisingly, candidates from all parties are paying attention only to those who vote. Children are once again forgotten. This is highly ironic given the recent shootings of innocent youth in Colorado and Alberta, the announcement in Canada of a national children=s agenda, a report by Fraser Mustard to the provincial government demanding more funding for young children, the new federal divorce act affecting millions of children in the country, and a recent report by the Canadian Council on Social Development documenting the pernicious effects of poverty on children and youth. The comprehensive research undertaken by the Council found that children living in families with an income under \$ 30,000 fared significantly worse than those whose families earned more. In fact, children in poor families are doing much worse in 80% of the 27 indicators studied, including measures of physical and emotional health.

The provincial landscape has changed enormously for children in the last decade. Recent figures show that there are close to 550,000 poor children in Ontario. In fact, there are now 116% more poor children in Ontario than there were in 1989. Research in Ontario also reveals that 31% of men and 21.1% of women report having been physically abused while growing up. Since 1992 the budgets for Children=s Aid Societies has gone down by 7.2%. About half a million, or roughly 18% of children in Ontario have psychiatric problems. We know that children who are victimized have 59% chance of being arrested as teens because they reproduce violent patterns of behaviour. Yet despite these alarming figures political candidates continue to ignore the plight of children. Instead, they try to appease influential lobby groups and voters. Children are easy to ignore because they don=t vote.

In light of the resounding silence concerning children=s issues, I challenge provincial politicians to share with the public how they are planning to (1) reduce the societal violence that is infecting our children=s minds, (2) eliminate the pernicious poverty that is robbing thousands of children of their rightful opportunities in life, (3) institute parenting, social, and emotional learning as part of the core curriculum in schools and as part of parenting centres across the province, (4) solve the child care crisis that prevents thousands of children from enjoying accessible and high quality care, and (5) deal with the shortage in housing affecting so many children and families. At the very least, can politicians please tell us how they plan to respond to the important report on early years by Dr. Fraser Mustard of the Canadian Institute of Advanced Research? After all, the provincial government commissioned the report to know how to improve the well-being of young children. Given the enormous challenges facing children in Ontario, one would hope political candidates would at least pay lip service to children=s issues. But they are not doing even that.

As political orphans, children are completely forgotten by spin doctors taking the pulse of the electorate. Children have no political pulse to speak of because they don=t vote. If politicians are neglecting children=s issues it is incumbent upon the electorate itself to put children on the agenda. I would urge the public to demand from politicians answers to the five points raised above. We know from research that the establishment of high quality early educational programs can increase children=s chances of success in school. We know that teaching parenting, social and emotional learning as part of the core curriculum in schools can improve the social climate of the community and families= quality of life. We know that adequately funded early intervention programs have proven to reduce family violence and future problems with the law. We know that effective prevention programs can save up to \$7 for each dollar invested. If we know so much about children=s health and family well-being, how come politicians are turning a blind eye to research? They are neglecting millions of children in the province because of the simple fact that they can ignore them. They can ignore them because children don=t represent a powerful constituency. It is politically more expedient to promise improved quality of life to adults, a part of the population politicians can seduce. Children=s neglect is a matter of intergenerational justice. Attention is paid to adults who vote and pay taxes. Meanwhile, we are ignoring those under voting age and are pouring most social resources into the age group that runs society.

I urge the electorate to vote for a party that will increase funding for children=s physical and emotional health. If you are concerned about children=s well-being, write to all candidates expressing your disappointment at their silence, share your concerns with colleagues at work, encourage the media to cover children=s issues. If you are a political candidate, I challenge you to commit yourself to (1) put in place effective policies and programs to eliminate child abuse and neglect, and all forms of family violence, (2) meet all children=s needs for food, shelter, health, and safety, (3) offer education in social skills and parenting as part of the core curriculum in schools, from grades 1 to 12, and as part of parenting centres throughout the province, (4) provide affordable, accessible, and high-quality child-care for all

children, and (5) produce a child impact statement before introducing new legislation, policies or programs at the provincial, regional and municipal levels.

In the absence of a clear children=s agenda for the upcoming election, I invite all Ontarians to discuss these issues. Children don=t vote, but we adults do. Will we represent their cause or will we just demand more societal resources for ourselves? The choice is ours, but the future is theirs.

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Child Abuse: How Much Longer?

Published in newsletter of Mental Health for the Young and their Family. Victoria, Australia, July 2001

Professor Isaac Prilleltensky

During the years 1998-99, there were over 100,000 notifications of abuse in Australia. Those notifications resulted in nearly 50,000 investigations. In 1997-98, there were over 26,000 substantiated cases of abuse and neglect across the country. According to the Weekend Australian (24/03/01), there are *16,000 children from babies to teenagers scattered across the country in foster families, refuges, with relatives, in motel rooms and on the streets.*

We all know that prevention is better than cure, but we are stuck in reactive mode. Studies indicate that ministries of health in western nations devote less than 1% of their budgets to prevention of mental health problems. Most of the money goes toward treatment. We know that about 20% of Australians suffer from a diagnosable psychological problem, but nobody seems to panic. We understand that brain malleability is greatest during the first years of life, but we spend most of our economic and social resources on adults and seniors. We have social funds for unemployed people and pension plans for the retired, but there is no comparable fund for disadvantaged children. Many emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and social problems, including child maltreatment, can be significantly prevented. Research shows that some prevention programs are effective and save governments up to 7 dollars for each dollar invested.

Although we appreciate in this country the benefits of prevention, not enough is done to implement its lessons into practice. We neglect prevention at our own peril.

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