

New Directions in Waldorf Early Childhood Education
Introduction
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In recent years Waldorf kindergarten education has spread into the world in a variety of ways that go beyond our traditional work with three to six year olds. In the Spring 1995 issue of the Newsletter we reported on new developments in day care, describing work in Holland and Denmark. Now there is growing interest in this country, which we hope to report on in future issues. If you are interested in issues of day care, please let us know, as well as other related issues.

Last month I had a chance to visit Carol Cole's work in San Francisco at Raphael House, a **homeless shelter** providing a safe and lovely environment for parents and children. At any one time there are about 20 children and 20 adults, the children ranging from infants to teens. Carol, who formerly taught kindergarten at the San Francisco Waldorf School and then founded a kindergarten for township children and Camphill children in South Africa, now works with children of all ages. She spends her mornings with the toddlers and pre-schoolers and one morning a week parents and children are together, including infants. In the early mornings and afternoons she works with the elementary aged children staying in the shelter before and after their regular school day. Some evenings she returns for story time for all the children, and once a week she works with low-income teenagers from the neighborhood. Another evening is for doll making with the parents in the shelter.

This is a rich and incredibly demanding life, but one already sees the fruits, even after only a few months. On the morning I was present, two little girls, about two years of age began shyly to interact with Carol and then with each other. Later they were happily playing house with dolls and dishes. It was a common sight, but counts as a miracle when one realizes that both were crack cocaine children, addicted at birth, separated for months from their mothers, and unable to interact or play when they began in Carol's program two months ago.

The day before I had visited Waldorf-inspired classrooms for **adolescents who were in jail or on probation** in Marysville, near Sacramento. Watching these youngsters respond to the main lessons with interest and then become enthusiastically engaged in art activities and recorder playing was moving.

Talking with them was disturbing - not because they were cruel, hardened criminals, but just the opposite. They spoke with a quiet warmth and sensitivity, and I left wishing they could have had the riches of Waldorf education at an earlier point in their lives. One can only hope that in their new-found enthusiasm for geometric drawing and other activities, they will also find a thread that leads them towards a healthier life. This takes tremendous commitment on the part of their teachers, and the Steiner College, which is working closely with these court-related schools is seeking funding for expanding their efforts with teachers and students.

Working in another setting is Meyrav Mor, a young Israeli who did the training at the Waldorf Institute of Southern California in Los Angeles. Last summer she moved to **Nepal** to work with homeless pre-schoolers there. She writes: "At last I'm in Kathmandu. This is my second day and I'm already trying to get to know the children. I loved them from the moment I saw them. It is very sad to see the poverty, and there is no understanding of how to teach the little ones. Three year olds here have workbooks and exams. I took them outside because their room is too small and full of desks (there are no toys or dolls). I did a short circle with them, and they loved it and started smiling. I had tears in my eyes." Mayrav's address is *c/o Ram Gopal Adhikari, GPB 8123 Kathmandu, Nepal. Phone. Nepal code + 1-524125.*

As we move out into such new directions, the landscape becomes varied and at times confusing. At a recent meeting the Kindergarten Association Board tried to identify the different areas calling to us. They included: after school programs in Waldorf schools, home care programs, both half day and full day for varying ages of children; free-standing day care centers and those connected to corporations; programs for low-income children; parent-tot programs and other programs for children under three. We are also interested in high school programs that help adolescents learn more about young children. With so many new areas evolving, it seems best to have a section of the Newsletter devoted to new developments. We hope you will keep it filled with reports and articles. To accommodate it, we will also be enlarging the Newsletter.