



Worldwide Wishes for a New Year

by Ken Jaffe, MA, JD

As the new year begins, it may be wise to look at what we in the child care community have to be thankful for as well as the challenges which lie ahead. From an international perspective, this has been a time of increased resource sharing between countries and regions:

East-West Cooperation: The International Child Resource Institute's European office, located in Holland, has been involved in a major effort to create the first combined child care and health center for children with AIDS in Romania. The center, located in the city of Iasi, will serve the needs of more than 300 children who contracted AIDS from poor blood supply in Romanian hospital pediatric units. ICRI and Humanitas of Holland, the largest national child care chain, have taken the lead in enacting this truly cooperative effort.

Western Europe Collaborates on Child Care: A series of conferences and meetings have brought together the best and the brightest to plot the future of child development practice in Europe. With strong support from the reenergized European Union and under the leadership of professor Peter Moss of the University of London, leaders from England, Germany, Belgium, Holland,

Sweden, Norway, Spain, Portugal, France, and Italy have launched a full scale exchange of quality standards, curricula, funding techniques, research, and more.

Meetings have been held in all parts of Europe, with the latest large assembly taking place in Lisbon, Portugal, in September. The meeting included a special day of discussions on the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale with the participation of Thelma Harms, its American creator. Participants shared new research and expertise which will help each country to gain a better understanding of the needs of children in their care while operating more effective programs.

Private Child Care Opportunities and the Emerging Middle Class of Africa: In the area identified as the Horn of Africa, known more for famine and war than for child care opportunities, new child care programs are emerging daily. This region makes up the North East section of Africa including such countries as Ethiopia and Eritrea. In the capital of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, private child care providers have seen an opportunity with a new political and social stability in the region to develop child care programs which meet working parents' needs. On nearly every street in certain sections of Addis, one sees new entrepreneurial child care centers and preschool programs.

As Ethiopian parents emerge from poverty, they see preschool experience as a learning tool for the full development of their children and as a necessity for the parent to continue in gainful employment. While the emerging middle class is small, there are now more extensive child care opportunities in Africa, primarily in large cities, to assist parents in getting to the next level.

While we can be thankful for the strides that have been made in offering child care opportunities under challenging circumstances, much remains to be done to avoid the stress of overcrowded and substandard work related child care efforts. Several plantation child care programs serving the children of employees' families have extremely poor adult to child ratios, little or no staff training, and an inadequate health infrastructure. Our hope for the new year is that these work place programs will continue in their effort to improve conditions for all in their care.

Throughout this year, we will continue to highlight unique efforts to create effective model child care programs worldwide.

The International Child Resource Institute is a consulting and project development group working to initiate or improve children's programs around the world. Ken Jaffe, MA, JD, the executive director of ICRI, has been a consultant to more than 300 child care programs worldwide.