

# Editorial

I've always found it hard — and painful — to believe quite how powerful is the effect on the individual of being in a group. Normally sane, decent people can become tormentors, bullies, even murderers when they allow themselves to be taken over by the mood or ethos of a group. They temporarily give up responsibility for their own values and acts, and allow an amorphous entity to decide.

I can understand the sense of relief and release that is probably involved — 'I can be bad and get away with it'; 'I can be bad and it's not my fault because I had to do it/everyone else was doing it/I was just going along with the majority'. Giving up responsibility allows us to return to childhood briefly and to let go of the continuous decision-making that goes with being adult.

Groups can encourage people to giving up responsibility, so when a group voluntarily *takes on* responsibility it is a heartening experience. The youth counselling service where I see clients has been through a major crisis recently: in April 1996 the county council, the main funding body, gave us twelve months' warning that it was going to withdraw its funding, with the result that the service has come very near to closing. At that time, the service workers consisted of one full- and three part-time paid staff and about twenty unpaid part-time counsellors. During the next twelve months various groups of paid

and unpaid workers met, discussed, argued organised, wrote letters, appealed, lobbied . . . and the result is that now the service is getting itself back on its feet, has arranged at least some funding, and is in the process of redefining itself.

There have scarcely been any occasions in the last year when we have all met together, but in March we had a facilitated weekend for the whole group to help us make the transition from a set-up where we were owned and sheltered by the county council to the scarier world of independence — where we have to take responsibility and make decisions. It was a wonderful weekend. Not because it was fun — it wasn't much — but because over twenty people, mostly unpaid, had come prepared to commit themselves, their time and skills, to carrying the service into the future. Because we hadn't met together for so long, there was much work to do on sharing feelings and information. It was very apparent that we were individuals, with different viewpoints, as well as a group, and at times it looked as if the crucial decisions we had to make might not get made. But they did, just, and by the end of the weekend there was just enough common feeling and understanding in the group for us to move on.

So here is one group that doesn't want to retreat to childhood; instead it feels like we are growing up.

*Fran Mosley*