

News From WE•CAN

Joan Almon and Susan Howard, Co-Chairs

Yes, you read it correctly! After years of working closely together Joan and Susan are now officially co-chairs of the Association. As you may already know, Susan directs the full time and associate early childhood teacher education programs at Sunbridge College, where she also co-directs the Waldorf Education Research Institute and publishes the Research Bulletin. The recent appointment of an Administrative Director at Sunbridge created a wee bit of space in her life which she is pleased to devote to the Early Childhood Association. One thing we promised her is that she would not need to trade one administrative job for another. Our own administrative work will continue to be ably carried by Lydia Roberson with some oversight by Joan. Joan and Lydia also have a number of publication projects on their plates (or in their computers) and will spend the winter months working on them.

It seems every organization needs an acronym these days, and we've gone back and forth as to what ours should be. Technically North America should yield us an NA at the end of ours, but WECANA always seemed to evoke sentences such as "We canna do this and we canna do that!" It just didn't seem to work. "WE CAN" seems closer to our spirit. If you dislike acronyms altogether, that's fine. We're most happy being known as the Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America.

At this year's board meeting in early November we were very happy to welcome Carol Cole as a new member. Carol taught kindergarten at the San Francisco Waldorf School for several years, then went to a Camphill in South Africa where she started a kindergarten that serves children from a nearby township and returned two years ago to take up work at a homeless shelter, Raphael House, in San Francisco. She has organized a child care program there and a special training for women formerly on welfare who want to become kindergarten teachers or home care providers. It is wonderful to meet these women and see how they are responding to a Waldorf based training. Carol will help us stay in touch with other Waldorf initiatives serving children in extreme social and economic situations.

As we reviewed the major areas of work within our Association, we realized we had one or more board members strongly connected with each. They offered to serve as bridges to others carrying out the work. Please feel free to contact them regarding your own work or your questions or concerns. Our list of work areas and related board members is as follows:

New Initiatives - There are now about 60 initiative groups hoping to develop Waldorf schools. Some are still in the discussion stage or have an active play group. Others have fully formed kindergartens and are waiting to start grades, and some have started grades but are still in AWSNA's new initiative category. Rena Osmer has been working hard to us develop a better infrastructure to serve these initiatives. She is in touch with the AWSNA regional committees so that their work and ours can be better coordinated. WECAN is also preparing a handbook for new initiatives.

Developments in established kindergartens - Susan Howard of Sunbridge College and Janet Kellman of Rudolf Steiner College are already in touch with many of the existing kindergartens and will continue to be an active bridge to them.

Child Care - This area of work is growing and takes on many forms: home care programs, before and after school programs, and new, full-time centers which are opening or being planned in a number of different communities. Cynthia Aldinger, who is opening a first Lifeways Family Center this year in Wisconsin serves as a focus person for child care work along with Rena Osmer in the east and Janet Kellman in the west.

Pre-birth to Three - Based on last year's survey, we think about half of Waldorf kindergartens in North America now have some sort of program for children under three. These range from pre-natal classes to parent-tot programs with the latter increasing very rapidly. Rena Osmer will serve as link to these initiatives.

Healing and Therapeutic Work - Kindergarten teachers have expressed a strong need for deeper insight into the problems of children today, and we are interested in the development of conferences, courses and publications. Nicola Tarshis of Toronto is taking the remedial training in the Midwest and has offered to serve as a link in this important new area. We hope that next year's board meeting will take an in-depth look at this area of our work.

Training and Continuing Education - Janet Kellman and Susan Howard, experienced in coordinating kindergarten training programs, will continue to focus on the questions of training and continuing education. Sunday's session of this year's board meeting specially focused on the trainings with several seminar leaders invited to participate with the board in these conversations.

Alliance for Childhood - Joan Almon will continue her efforts to develop an alliance within the anthroposophic movement and between our movement and other organizations. The board wishes to organize an alliance conference in 2001, probably in Washington, D.C., and in the meantime is working on establishing relations with a number of childhood organizations. There will also be an international conference in Brussels in October 2000.

Work with children in extreme social and economic circumstances - Carol Cole will serve as focus person in this critical area. At present there are trained kindergarten teachers working in homeless shelters and inner city kindergartens.

Liaison with other organizations - Susan Howard serves on the Eastern Regional Committee of AWSNA and is an AWSNA delegate for Sunbridge. She thus has regular contact with AWSNA and will handle most of the liaison work with them. Joan Almon will continue to serve as liaison with the International Waldorf Kindergarten Association, and we are hoping that Susan will also be able to attend their meetings on a more regular basis.

Missing from our meeting was Marjorie Thatcher from Vancouver, and we want to extend our warm thanks to her for many years of service on the board. Marjorie was one of the original board members who started our Association in 1983. Now that she is teaching full time again as well as heading up an associate training in British Columbia, she found it was no longer possible to serve on the board. We will miss her calm presence and gentle New Zealand/Canadian humor.