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PLUS a review of current resources
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What Value Family?

Have you ever had to stay in a distant city over a Saturday night to get a cheaper airfare? Often, in Washington, D.C., I have been asked by Boards or the University to stay over Saturday night in order to save $300 - $500. Have you noticed that hotels charge less on the weekends, again sometimes requiring us to stay over the weekend? Have you noticed how holidays and vacations are not coordinated between schools, government, and businesses? Have you noticed how a number of social policies, from Temporary Assistance to Needy Families to the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) of 1997 focus on the individual and not the family unit? Little support is provided in our society to give families more time together.

During the recent election one could not escape the overwhelming rhetoric supporting family values in our society. The politicalization of families changed in the early 1970s when President Richard Nixon, a conservative, “captured” the family issue by declaring child care as anti-family. Family issues have remained prominent on the political landscape.

What value do we really place on families in our society? The reality of U.S. policy and practice raises serious questions. Airlines place making money first inhibiting families from being together on the weekend. The new Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 focuses more on children and less on the family unit—more on artificial time lines and less on skills to keep families together. It is clear our society does not really value families. Fortunately, under ASFA, States will be funded at a higher level to provide Family Preservation Services, even though the name has been changed, bowing to political pressure.

The family concept in American society has run headlong into rugged individualism. It appears that until this basic philosophy is addressed and clarified, those of us in the Family Preservation business will be hard pressed to get policy makers and program directors to truly value families and provide family-centered practice. There are a number of preventative activities through education, child care, employment, benefits, support services, and funding that are critically needed.

The White House Conference on Children in 1969 stated, “Home life is the highest and finest product of civilization. It is the great molding force of mind and character. Children should not be deprived of it except for urgent and compelling reasons.” If only we could match this mission with our policies and actions today.

The articles in this issue help expand our knowledge and approach to work with families. Dr. Barry’s study of the use of groups to help mothers who have been neglectful and feel isolated speaks to the need for agencies and workers to support the goals of families in their social environment. Ways to structure access and design programs for Intensive Family Preservation in Children’s Mental Health based on the predictions of placement is found in Dr.