

FOR THE SAKE OF THE CHILDREN - BARBARA HOLBROW

Retired Children's Court Magistrate, Barbara Holbrow spoke to the May seminar about her work as a magistrate, particularly relating anecdotes of cases she was involved in.

It was Mary Gaudron who had her apply for the position of Magistrate in the Children's Court.

Her experience there caused her to be the prime mover in setting up free legal aid for all children between 0-16 years of age. She was also instrumental in setting up a Care Court to protect mothers, a project which took her two and a half years.

She was laudatory of Fiona Stanley who has proved that it is the first three years of a child's life that determines their future. Children get their sense of humour at two years of age.

There are now no diversionary programs in existence, so young offenders end up in detention centres far more so than before. Not only can it damage those young offenders but the average cost of a bed in a custodial system is \$160000 a year, so it also makes economic sense to avoid locking up offenders unnecessarily. So there is the need for diversionary programs and weekend detention.

She said that in all decisions about children it is always necessary to keep in mind the best interests of the child. Therefore there are some parents who should not have contact with their children. There are some poor judgments giving access to unworthy parents. However fathers were at one time treated poorly but this has changed.

She says that today family courts and family court judges are too far removed from the problems of today's families. .